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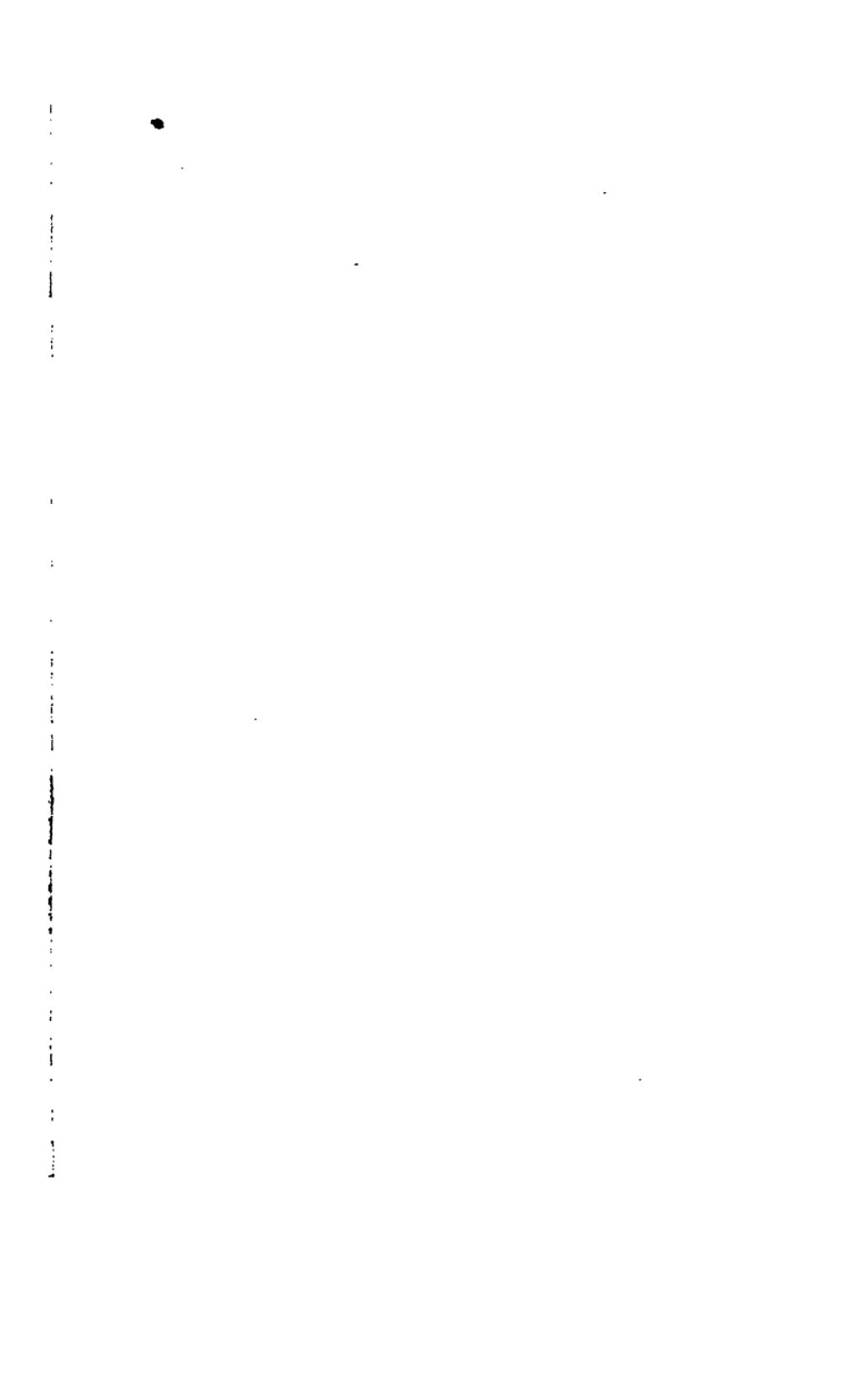




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H O M E S U N S H I N E.





Willie presents his Mamma with a Daisy.

HOME SUNSHINE.

BY

CATHERINE D. BELL,

AUTHOR OF "ALLEN AND HARRY," "LILY GORDON," "HOPE CAMPBELL,"
"THE HUGUENOT FAMILY," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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P R E F A C E.

HE aim of this tale is to inculcate, by example as well as precept, the duty of cultivating a cheerful and contented spirit. The moral sunshine which the young Gordons diffused over "Sunny Brae," is reflected on the pages of the story itself. We hope a ray of it may enter the heart of its young readers, and lend a new charm to their homes, and a new grace to their characters.





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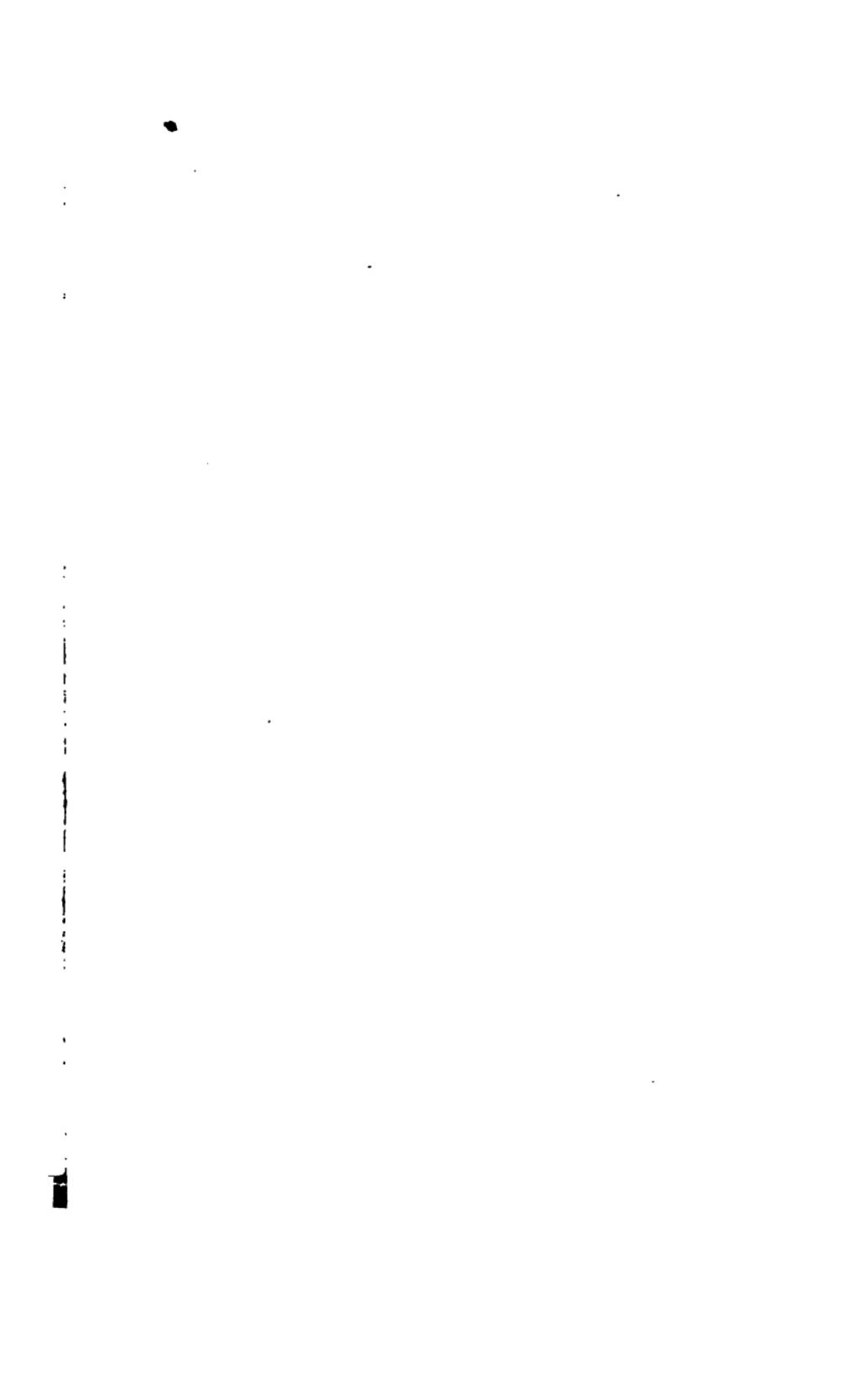
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up after the reading, in which she dwelt much upon the happiness of feeling sure that God did really know every circumstance of their lives, did really order everything for their best interests.

As they rose from their knees, Agnes looked wistfully in her mother's face. But Mrs Gordon seemed disinclined for further conversation, and urged that the children should go at once to bed. So they said good-night, and went up-stairs without further question.

Left alone, Mrs Gordon returned to her former seat in the window. The moon had now risen. Broad masses of its soft quiet light lay upon the lawn, and the dark outline of the hills was marked upon the brightening sky with a fine and solemn effect. Mrs Gordon looked over to the Ash-tree Crag. If her husband were still there she meant to join him, in order to tell him at once that she was now prepared for the very worst news he might have to give. But the moon shone full on the terraced summit of the crag, and showed that it was vacant. And Mrs Gordon was afraid to go to seek him, lest she might miss him, and he might come to the house to seek her. So she sat down to watch, to think, and to pray for strength to bear the sorrow and anxiety which she knew were before her.

The moon rose higher and higher. The minutes passed quickly on, and still he did not come. Ten o'clock struck. Never did she recollect his remaining out past that hour, the hour for family prayer. She became anxious, and looked and listened with an eagerness which made her nearly unable to see or hear dis-

tinctly. After a few minutes, however, as if he had heard and been recalled by the sound of the clock, she recognised his step on the gravel walk, near the window. She leaned out to catch a glimpse of his face. She saw him coming up the walk with his usual quick, decided tread ; but his head was bent down, he did not see her. She could not read his countenance. Suddenly he paused for a moment, and looked up at the glorious moon, and then Mrs Gordon was struck with his expression of brave and cheerful patience. She fancied that he was looking up to the sky, as if fully recognising whose hand had drawn the thick cloud over all their happy prospects.

Before he resumed his walk, she drew in her head, and softly closed the window. His mind was now, she thought, strong and at peace. She should spare him the pain of telling her the bad news—at least until after family worship was over. Not even by a questioning look should she draw the truth from him before he wished to tell it to her.

She heard him pass the window, and go round the corner of the house. Pearson, the old butler, had apparently gone to the door, anxious at his master's unusual absence from home. Mr Gordon's voice was heard, in very much its usual tones, desiring Pearson to sound the gong for prayers. Even if she had wished it, there would have been no time for question or answer. The servants, accustomed to great regularity, were all ready. Pearson followed his master to arrange the lights and get the large Bible ; and before he had left

the room the housekeeper was coming in at another door, followed by the long train of servants. Without a word or a look passing between them, the husband and wife sat down side by side, and the solemn service of the hour began.





CHAPTER II.

THE DARK CLOUD HAS COME UP.

DRAYERS were over. The servants had withdrawn. Mrs Gordon stood by her husband's side as they had risen from their knees. As the door closed, and they were left alone, she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and, looking calmly into his eyes, said—

“Dearest Lionel, do not be afraid to tell me everything; I am prepared for the worst.”

“And what should you think the worst, my own brave little wife?” he asked, tenderly, half sadly.

“That we have lost every farthing,” was her prompt, steady answer.

“That is true enough,” he answered. “But there might have been a worse still; and from that, by the good hand of our God upon us”—looking reverently upwards—“from that we are saved.”

“What worse? How worse?” she asked, anxiously.

“We might have lost everything, have paid away our

last farthing, and still have been in debt," he answered, very gravely.

"Ah, true ; I forgot that," she cried, looking for the first time really alarmed and distressed. "But are we saved from that? How can we know we are? May there not be for us months, years of suspense—of hoping, fearing, doubting, as there were for the poor Morgans, in a similar case? And may not our suspense end as theirs did, in finding that we are deeply, irrecoverably in debt?"

"There might have been such years of suspense for us," he answered. "And ah, Mary, if you only knew how I have dreaded, with even a sickening dread, that you might be called upon to pass through such a terrible wasting time of doubts and fears. It seemed as if that were a part of our trial we could not bear. But," with much feeling, "the Lord has rebuked my faithlessness with the most tender kindness. It makes a child of me," he added, brushing the unusual moisture from his eyes, "to feel that while my faint heart was saying that I could not bear what He sent on me, He, in His love, was taking care that I should be saved from the dreaded evil. Well may His prophet exclaim, 'Is this the manner of men?'"

He paused a moment, as if overcome by his feelings, and then went on :

"But you must wish to know how we are at once placed beyond the risk of debt. It has been by a means no one could have expected. You know I wrote to Mr Jones to act for me, stating the value of my property,

of every kind, as nearly as I could estimate it in a short space of time, and, at your request, offering to give up your marriage settlement to the creditors. I don't know what there was in my letter to admire," with a half smile; "I only said what I had to say, and that was all. No man, in the circumstances, could have done more; no man could have done less."

"Perhaps not," Mrs Gordon interrupted; "but you would say it in a manly, straightforward way, without a word of complaint or murmur."

"Much good complaint or murmur would have done," he answered, this time smiling outright. "I never thought of such a thing. I don't believe any man, to call a man, could think of such a thing. Any way, Jones, good, earnest friend that he is, liked the letter greatly; heard that my Uncle Colin was in England—was in Liverpool; sought him out; placed the letter in his hands; and he—only think, Mary—he at once told Jones to write to me, to say that he should take upon himself every debt that might remain after my estate and property had been sold; that from that hour I might consider myself a free, although a ruined man."

"Your Uncle Colin!" Mrs Gordon exclaimed,—"who has held no intercourse with us for years?"

"Even so. Must we not say, 'By the good hand of our God upon us,' we have been wonderfully saved from misery?"

"But how? but why? I do not, I cannot understand," Mrs Gordon persisted.

Mr Gordon smiled.

"It is terribly ungracious," he said, "to search deeply or suspiciously into the motives of a generous action done to ourselves. But I will tell you the motives which have suggested themselves to my mind as likely to have influenced my good uncle. You know his inordinate, as I have sometimes called it, his insane pride, in the greatness and prosperity of his father's mercantile house of Gordon and Co. I do believe he would joyfully strip himself of every farthing of his immense fortune sooner than that any man should ever be able to say he had been a loser by his transactions with that firm."

"I believe he would," Mrs Gordon said, "more particularly as he has no wife or child, poor fellow, for whose sake his money might be valuable. But you said there were two motives."

"Yes. Uncle Colin knows well that to him it is mainly owing that I have still any connexion with the firm. Had I been permitted to break that connexion when I wished to do so, our present trial could never have come upon us."

He spoke the last words gloomily, almost bitterly. But in another instant his face brightened again, and he added heartily—

"However, that is a point of view with which we must have nothing to do. It was the will of my Father in heaven that I should lose all my fortune; and it was for Him to choose what means to that end He saw best. The result and the means were equally in His hands, came equally from Him."

Mrs Gordon assented heartily to this truth, and a long discussion followed upon the ways and means of supporting their family in this new and unexpected state of matters. That discussion, though deeply interesting to them, might be tiresome to my young readers; so I shall spare them from listening to it, and shall only say that Mr Gordon told his wife that Mr Colin Gordon had refused to allow her to give up her marriage settlement, and had further offered them a ten years' lease, rent free, of a small house, with garden and orchard, which belonged to him, in the village of Knock Earn, about seven miles from Eagle's Crag. They agreed to accept this offer, as Mr Gordon intended to occupy himself in literary pursuits, which could be carried on as well in that retired spot as in either metropolis. Mr Gordon had a high character in the literary and scientific world. He had often contributed to reviews and magazines for his own pleasure; and there was no hardship, he said, in doing that for the support of his family which he had always liked to do. A great London publisher had only a fortnight previously applied to him to furnish articles for an *Encyclopædia* which he proposed to publish. By that time Mr Gordon had heard rumours of danger to the Liverpool mercantile house in which he was sleeping partner. He had given no decided answer to the publisher's offer until he could know how matters should turn out, and was therefore now able to avail himself of it. All these matters were fully discussed before Mr and Mrs Gordon

left the drawing-room, at a late hour that night, or rather at an early one the following morning.

In the meantime the children were forgetting in sleep any alarm which their mother's words or manner had excited in their minds. The next morning rose as bright and fair as the May-day which had preceded it. The young people were, as usual, up very early, and out before seven o'clock, attending to their rabbits, pigeons, and other pets. At half-past seven they met, as was the constant custom, in their father's study, where Mr and Mrs Gordon were ready to receive them.

Mr and Mrs Gordon were most anxious that their children should early learn to study the Bible by themselves, and for themselves. At night, after the varied exercises and amusements of the day, there was a danger that the young minds and bodies might be too tired and drowsy to give God's holy Word the earnest attention it demands; therefore the evening chapter was read aloud, as I have described, so that the father and mother might be able to arouse or quicken attention and interest where they flagged. And at such times the Bible was gone regularly through, in order to ensure that no part was neglected. But in the morning each read alone, in his or her room, and they were encouraged to choose portions for themselves, as their own feelings at the time might prompt.

When they met their parents in the study, they told what chapter each had read, and were encouraged to ask questions, or make any remarks upon the passages which had struck them. The father or mother gene-

• rally said a few words, applying the lessons contained in the chosen chapters to the circumstances of their own daily life ; and the meeting was closed by Mr Gordon's praying with and for his children, making his prayer to turn upon the subjects discussed, returning thanks for any precious promise, or assurance of God's love and grace, which had been before them, asking for strength to avoid the sins and to perform the duties to which their attention had been especially directed.

It was further a habit with the children to learn by heart and repeat to their parents any verse or verses which had more particularly struck or pleased them. This was not required of them. But they knew well that to do it gave peculiar pleasure to both father and mother. The three elder children never failed to have at least one verse ready. Nor did Cecil, except upon those too frequent occasions when severe headache had made him incapable of the exertion. Colin fully intended every morning to learn a verse, and in dull and rainy weather generally fulfilled his intention. But on a bright day like the present, it was seldom that he could resist the temptation to run out as soon as he possibly could.

The choice of chapters and verses often enabled Mr and Mrs Gordon to understand the state of their children's thoughts and feelings ; and as regarded Lionel and Agnes, that was peculiarly the case on this morning.

By the chapters which they had chosen to read, by the verses which they had chosen to learn, it was easy to

see that they had not at all forgotten the conversation of the previous night. Lionel had read the thirty-fourth Psalm, and had learned the seventh verse—

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

Agnes had read the fourth chapter of Philippians, and learned the sixth verse—

“Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

Mr and Mrs Gordon had consulted together how best to prepare their children for the great change of life before them. They had decided to begin upon the subject this morning, and were glad to have so good an opening as these chapters gave them.

“Your mind was full of what we talked of last night, my dear Agnes, when you chose that verse,” Mrs Gordon said, after Agnes had repeated it with much emphasis.

“Yes, mamma. Has the sorrow come? Does it make you very unhappy?” she said, eagerly, drawing near her mother.

“The sorrow has come,” Mr Gordon answered, “and it is a very serious one. But as it does not touch either the life or health of any one dear to us, I don’t think it ought to make us *very* unhappy.”

“What is it, then? May we know? What does it touch?” Lionel asked.

“Our fortune, my dear boy. It is indeed a great trial. I have lost all my money. Eagle’s Crag must be

sold. We must leave this beautiful place, and go to live in a small house, with very few servants. We must sell our carriages and horses, even your ponies, my poor children."

Mr Gordon said this slowly. He wished to give the children time to take in the full extent of their losses. But they could not at once realise it. They looked at each other in silent amazement and bewilderment. Lionel was the first to speak.

"But how? but why?" he asked, with a kind of impatience. "Is not Eagle's Crag your own? Who can sell it? Or who can make you sell it?"

"Yes; who, indeed?" cried Colin, indignantly. "Are not you Gordon of Eagle's Crag, and no one, not even the Queen upon her throne, has any right to touch it."

"No one might, perhaps, have such a right," Mr Gordon replied, with a grave smile at Colin's vehemence, "were I only Gordon of Eagle's Crag. But I am also Gordon of the great firm of Gordon & Co. The partners in it have been unsuccessful—I am afraid, imprudent. They have got into difficulties, into debts; and to pay my share of these debts will take every farthing I possess, besides the price I shall get for Eagle's Crag, for my horses, carriages, furniture, everything."

"But, papa," Lionel said, "you had nothing to do with their getting into debt, with their being unsuccessful."

This he asserted with all a child's confidence in his father's wisdom and prudence. To him it was a matter of perfect certainty that his father could not fail or be unsuccessful.

"I had nothing directly to do with the matter, Lionel," Mr Gordon said. "The greater part of my money was engaged in the transactions of the firm, and I received a large proportion of its profits. But I never had, or, at least, never exercised any control over the conduct of business. I never took any part in it. I have been that foolish, hateful thing, a sleeping partner."

Lionel and Malcolm looked the question they hesitated to ask. Mr Gordon understood and answered their looks.

"You wish to know why I have been a sleeping partner, if I think it foolish to be so. I am afraid you could hardly understand all the business."

"I think they can. Try them," said Mrs Gordon.

"Yes; try us, papa," said Lionel and Malcolm, coming close up to him.

Colin had no liking for matters which were difficult to be understood, or which required much attention. He lay down upon the hearth-rug to play with a favourite kitten. Cecil, his twin brother, as tender-hearted as Agnes, like her, drew close to his mother's side, and seemed most of all anxious to know how she felt under this sorrow.

"You must pay great attention then, for I must make a short story of it," Mr Gordon said, glancing at the time-piece. "I suppose you know that Eagle's Crag has belonged to our family for a long time."

"Yes," cried Colin, eagerly looking up, "Dugald Cairns says that the Gordons have been Gordons of Eagle's Crag since ever Scotland was a land."

"My knowledge does not go back quite so far," Mr Gordon said, smiling; "but, at any rate, for some hundreds of years our forefathers have been Gordons of Eagle's Crag. In those dark ages, of which Colin knows so much, I do not know what was the character of the Gordons. I suppose there were good and bad among them. But, for some generations back, they have been a sadly foolish, extravagant race, going on, from father to son, spending, year by year, more money than they had to spend, running into debt to this person and to that—to whoever would lend them money; selling land here and burdening it there, until little was left to sell or burden. And, by the time my grandfather was of age and came into possession of his property, there was wonderfully little to possess. He was a young man of uncommon energy and talent. He could not stumble through life as his forefathers had done, struggling with debts and difficulties, without ever rising out of them. He saw at once that something must be done, done by himself, and done without delay. His mind was soon made up as to what that something should be. He had no interests to consult but his own. He had no near relations. He was an only son. His father and mother were dead. He was perfectly at liberty to judge and act for himself. He did so at once. He had received an excellent education, but did not think himself prepared for any of the learned professions. At Cambridge he had been very intimate with the son of one of the great Liverpool merchants. He had always felt much interested by the young man's tales of mercantile adventure,

mercantile success. He resolved to try his fortune in that line.

“The family friends clamoured and entreated in vain. None had any authority over him. As they could not help him, he thought that they had no right to keep him from helping himself. Their arguments seemed to him unworthy a moment’s attention. They represented that it was beneath the dignity of a Scottish gentleman of family to become a merchant.”

“And they were right,” interrupted Colin from his hearth-rug.

“He thought, and justly,” Mr Gordon pursued, with a good-humoured nod and smile to Colin, “that it was a hundred times more beneath the dignity of a Scottish gentleman of family to live in debt an hour longer than he could help. He found a tenant for Eagle’s Crag, went up to Liverpool, entered as clerk into the house of his friend’s father, and gave his whole mind to learn his new business.

“As soon as he was perfectly master of it, he sold a small property belonging to his mother, and with the capital so realised began business on his own account. In those days fortunes were made rapidly in the mercantile world. My grandfather was a man of extraordinary energy. He succeeded even beyond others, and in a wonderfully short space of time was able to buy back what had been sold, to free what had been burdened of the property of his ancestors.”

“Then he should have given up the merchant, and been Gordon of Eagle’s Crag once more,” observed Colin.

“He might have done so certainly; but by that time his whole heart was in his business. His sons, my father and my Uncle Colin, shared his liking for a mercantile life. And when my grandfather gave my father the choice of becoming either a plain country gentleman or a partner in the Liverpool firm, he at once chose the latter.

“Uncle Colin, by virtue of some family compact, went into the house of a relation of his mother’s. He was always a peculiar tempered man. He early took a dislike to his native country—I don’t know why; and, upon the house with which he was connected establishing a branch in America, he went there, and has, I believe, realised an immense fortune.”

“Then, papa, did you live with grandpapa in Liverpool? Did you not come to live here till after grandpapa’s death?” Malcolm asked.

“What a fool you are, Malcolm,” Lionel said, in his somewhat overbearing manner. “Why, I can recollect grandpapa, and I am sure I have lived here all my life. Besides, you must have heard papa say a hundred times that all his life was spent at Eagle’s Crag.”

“The greater part of it at least,” Mr Gordon said. “My father kept Eagle’s Crag in his own hands. My mother was very fond of it. Her health was delicate, and this air agreed better with her than any other. So she and I lived here almost all the year, and my father came to us as often as possible.

“When I was old enough to judge, my father gave me the same choice that his father had given him. I

had become very fond of a country life, and had been taught by my dear mother, that my duty to my tenants and dependents required that I should live among them. I therefore asked to be freed from all connexion with the Liverpool business. My father had no other son, and was not very willing that the celebrated firm of Gordon & Co. should become extinct ; but when I told him of my firm conviction, that it was foolish if not wrong to be connected in transactions over which we had no control, he yielded at first to my wish.

“ When, however, you, Lionel, were about three years old, your mother and I were obliged to spend a winter abroad with the good aunt who had brought your mother up. I was hastily recalled by my father’s alarming illness. I found him greatly changed — his mind much weakened. Uncle Colin, who was most inordinately grieved that the house his father had made glorious should be for ever lost, had come over to England on purpose to persuade his brother to make me continue at least a nominal connexion with the firm. My father’s junior partners, his nephews, added their persuasions ; and the end was that my father drew from me a promise to continue the connexion for at least ten years.

“ These ten years expired some months ago. I did not at first hasten matters to dissolve the partnership, as I might have done ; and before the necessary steps could be taken, the firm had failed.”

Mr Gordon spoke the last words very rapidly, and as soon as he had concluded, rose to leave the room. It

was time for morning prayers. The boys followed unwillingly. They had still many questions to ask.

"Well, papa," said Lionel, decidedly, "of course he was your father. But still I can't help feeling that grandpapa ought not to have asked you to do what you thought wrong, for the sake of any Uncle Colin in the world."

"Had I thought it actually wrong, I hope nothing could have induced me to consent to it," Mr Gordon answered. "But I only thought it imprudent, not exactly wrong. My father, you must remember, thought it all quite right."

"Besides," said Mrs Gordon, "you must remember that not Uncle Colin's persuasions alone moved grandpapa, but also his concern for his young partners, his nephews, whom he loved very tenderly."

"True," assented Mr Gordon. "They were young men with little fortune of their own. Had I at once withdrawn my capital, they must have been greatly hampered."

"Still," persisted Lionel, "you were grandpapa's own son; he should first of all have cared for you."

"So he did. He had perfect confidence in the ability and prudence of his partners. Under his control they had shown themselves first-rate men of business. He hoped and believed that the affairs of the firm would prosper under them, even as they had done under him. He told me that if I continued the connexion with them, he believed my fortune might be doubled or trebled. And," with a smiling glance back upon his boys, "when he saw how many sons were springing up among us, he

thought I ought to maintain my connexion for the sake of a future opening in life for one of you lads."

They had now reached the dining-room, and no more could be said. They had to prepare for family worship, and a solemn service it was.

While consulting how best to tell their children of the great change in their prospects, Mr and Mrs Gordon had anxiously considered the best and kindest way of making it known to their servants. They had been singularly fortunate in servants. They were all faithfully attached friends. With the exception of two or three younger and inferior ones, all had been with Mrs Gordon since her marriage, fifteen years before. Some—the old butler, the housekeeper, the laundrymaid, the coachman—had served the former Mrs Gordon, and had lived with the family between thirty and forty years. Sorrow of any kind to their master and mistress would, as that master and mistress knew well, be deep sorrow to them; and the approaching separation must be very painful to both parties.

Mr Gordon desired to make this morning service a preparation for the pain he must so soon give them. He began by saying, that, as from peculiar circumstances they all stood in need of strength and comfort, he should depart from the regular course of reading, and choose a chapter adapted to their present position. He took the forty-third chapter of Isaiah. And as he read it slowly and with strong emphasis, more especially the first precious and most comforting verses, every heart was filled with a most solemn feeling of awe and expectation. In

prayer he made direct allusion to the trial which had come upon them, and asked for strength for each one present to bear his or her own portion. And not the most thoughtless among them that morning left the room without a thorough conviction that some great and painful change was before them. For more than a fortnight past the more observant had dreaded that something was going wrong. They had felt that neither their master nor mistress were so cheerful as usual ; and Pearson saw plainly, and had often said, that the letters so anxiously looked for had brought no pleasant news. Anxious, fearful, the little world down-stairs waited for surer intelligence.

They were not kept long in suspense. Immediately after breakfast, Pearson and Mrs Morgan were summoned to Mr Gordon's study. He thought it due to the tender attachment of these old friends, to tell them the painful truth in private rather than in the presence of the other servants. He would not suffer Mrs Gordon to share the affecting interview.

After some time he came to her in the drawing-room, bearing traces in his countenance of having been greatly overcome. He came to tell her what had passed. Agnes was present. The boys had gone on a kind of solemn pilgrimage, a ramble round all their favourite haunts, as if they had been to leave their home that very day.

“Certainly to have made such faithful, such affectionate friends is a great blessing,” Mr Gordon said, with much emotion. “And even the sorrow one feels in parting with them is well worth bearing.”

"Had they any idea of what was before them?" *Mrs Gordon* asked.

"They had suspected that something was wrong even before to-day, and my manner at prayers had confirmed their suspicions. There was a meeting in the servants' hall immediately after prayers, and Pearson told me that every one, even Thomas, who has been with me only two years, declared their resolution to remain with us under any circumstances. Even if we could give them little or no wages, they would rather serve us for love than any one else for all the money in the world."

"O papa," cried Agnes, joyfully, "if we can only keep them with us, all else will be easily borne."

"My dear child," *Mr Gordon* said, with a grave, sad smile, "to feed such an army of servants with even the plainest food would make a terrible hole in our small income. And the house we are going to could hardly hold them, even without ourselves."

"Besides, my dear Agnes," observed *Mrs Gordon*, "we could not allow them to injure themselves for our sakes."

"Only, mamma," she urged, "if they feel that they should be really happier with us than with strangers; if they themselves would rather have that happiness than good wages."

"Most of them have other things to care for than their own happiness, my dear," said *Mr Gordon*; "there is hardly one of them who has not some relative or friend dependent upon them."

Agnes sighed as she recollected Elspeth's old father

and mother, Jenny's infirm blind sister, and the wife and young family of George the coachman, who had married late in life.

“But Pearson, papa,” unwilling to give up all hope. “His wife is dead, his daughter married, and his sons are grown up, and need no help from him.”

“That was what Pearson himself urged with great earnestness. But you must remember that Pearson’s health is not good. For the last two years we have suffered him to do little except superintend others. Were he to live with us in our new kind of life, his zeal would lead him to overwork himself, so that I don’t believe he would live a twelvemonth.”

Agnes felt the truth of this, though unwilling to acknowledge it. Turning to his wife, Mr Gordon continued :

“We must try to get a situation for Pearson where his faithfulness will be more considered than his power of work. And if we cannot find one every way suitable, we must get his sons to persuade him to spend his money in buying an annuity, so that his old age may be passed in peace. They are too dutiful to hesitate.”

A long conversation followed upon the best way of getting good situations for these faithful servants. Agnes did not like it. She could not bear to think of any one but themselves having her old and dearly loved friends. She went out to seek her brothers to tell them this new sorrow.



CHAPTER III.

LAST DAYS AT EAGLE'S CRAG.

HIS was a very trying day to poor Mrs Gordon. One by one the servants came to entreat that she would keep them in her service, to assure her that they did not regard wages, if only they might be permitted to remain in her family. For her own sake Mrs Gordon would gladly have compressed all these interviews into one, and shortened that one by an authoritative decision of the question. But one peculiar beauty of her character lay in her ready sympathy with, and consideration for, the feelings of others. She understood well that it was a real relief to these old friends to be allowed to express their attachment and to offer their services; and she was ready to give them that relief, even at the expense of much pain and harassment to herself. With cordial frankness expressing her own sorrow at parting with them, she took pains to show them that she fully believed and deeply felt their attachment and desire to serve her. Patiently she urged and re-urged upon each the reasons which made it right to decline their offers, and forced them one by one to yield,

and to acknowledge reluctantly that she was right, and could not take a different course.

Three exceptions alone there were to this yielding. Three of the female servants carried their point, and obtained a re-engagement for the next six months. One of these, the nursery-maid, Mrs Gordon was very glad to keep. She was quite a young woman, the nurse who had brought up the elder children having died rather suddenly two years before, when Mary, the under-nurse, had been promoted to fill her place. Mary was an orphan, and had no relations, at least none that she knew of. Since she was ten years old she had been taken care of by Mrs Gordon, and Eagle's Crag had been her home. She had been carefully trained by Mrs Gordon, and by the old nurse, and was indeed such a valuable servant that her mistress knew she could easily get her a good situation. But Mary, besides being young, was remarkably pretty; peculiarly simple-hearted, and, guileless herself, she believed every one to be the same. She was too credulous, too sensitive, perhaps too yielding, to be exposed to rough contact with the world. Mrs Gordon felt that she would be both safer and happier with her than with strangers, and gladly granted her tearful request to be allowed to stay.

The other two persistents were the housemaid and dairymaid. During the fifteen years they had been at Eagle's Crag they had become much attached to each other, as well as to the family. While the other servants were proclaiming their intention to cling to their master and mistress in every circumstance, Bell and

Nelly conferred apart, and, quietly deciding that their mistress could not keep all her servants, they as quietly decided that they should be the ones to be chosen, and they arranged how the household work should be divided between them. They had no relatives depending upon their assistance, no one to consider but themselves ; and therefore they were the more able to resist all Mrs Gordon's arguments, and to obtain their wishes. Mrs Gordon was not sure that the plan was altogether wise for either party ; but in the end she yielded to their earnest petitions, and was indeed glad to think that she should not have to part with all the servants to whom she had so long trusted, and who were so truly attached to her.

In the evening, after tea, she told her husband and children how the matter had been decided.

“ O mamma, how glad I am ! ” cried Agnes. “ It is such a pleasure to have good old Bell and Nelly still to serve us. Is it not ? ”

“ It is a real happiness to have such good, trustworthy friends, and to be able to keep them with us ; but I am not quite so sure that the arrangement will be altogether pleasant,” Mrs Gordon answered.

The children looked at her, in great surprise. But there was no time for explanation. Mr Gordon proposed that, as the evening was very fine, they should go together to their favourite haunt of the Ash-tree Crag. It was a melancholy visit. Mr and Mrs Gordon felt that it might be the last time that they could all be there together. Mr Gordon was to go to Liverpool the fol-

lowing morning. He did not know how long he might be obliged to stay; and Mrs Gordon desired, for her own sake, for the children's, and for the servants', to leave Eagle's Crag as soon as possible. She wished to spare herself and her children the pain of lingering long among those scenes they so dearly loved, and must leave for ever. And she wished to set her servants free as soon as possible, that they might go to Edinburgh to seek situations before the Whitsunday term. In Scotland the best engagements are always for six months, from Whitsunday to Martinmas, and from Martinmas to Whitsunday. And Mr and Mrs Gordon felt particularly anxious to give their old and faithful servants every opportunity of engaging themselves advantageously.

Their father and mother did not tell the children that they feared they might never again all meet on their favourite crag. But it was the first time they had so met since the great change had come over their prospects; and even the light-hearted Malcolm, the thoughtless Colin, felt oppressed and saddened as they looked round upon their beautiful home.

“We have been so happy,” Agnes said, with a faltering voice, after there had been a silence of some duration, which no one seemed inclined to break.

“And for that happiness, although past, we owe fervent gratitude to the God who in His loving-kindness provided it for us,” Mrs Gordon said, earnestly. “Every heart is, or ought to be, the better all through life for a bright, happy childhood, such as yours has been, my children.”

"And the happiness of our home, of our lives, is yet left to us," Mr Gordon said, in his own cheerful voice. "It is only some of the pleasantness, some of the enjoyment which God has seen best to take from us."

"Papa," Lionel said, abruptly, "that is like what mamma said about Bell and Nelly. Mamma seems to think that happiness and pleasure are two different things."

"And so they are, I think," Mrs Gordon answered, looking at her husband for confirmation of her opinion.

"Quite different," he pronounced; "if you children consider for a little, I think you might be able to find out the difference for yourselves."

"I think I know," Cecil said, quickly, turning away his head with a deep blush, as he saw every one's eyes turned upon him.

Cecil was thoughtful beyond his years. His health had always been delicate. Often, for weeks at a time, he was hindered from joining in the sports or excursions of the other children, sometimes wholly confined to the sofa. In this way he had enjoyed more of his mamma's society than any of them, even than Agnes. Girl as she was, being strong, healthy, and active, she was both able and willing to take her part with the boys in their works and plays. And while Cecil rested by his mother's side half-way in their long walks, Agnes was well able to accomplish the whole distance—was able to give efficient assistance in many a labour which Cecil was content to watch and admire. He had read more and thought more than even Lionel; and having his mother

always beside him to clear up his own thoughts and feelings, he often surprised the others by the readiness with which he understood what seemed inexplicable to them. He was, however, a very shy boy, and might not have been able to explain himself upon the present occasion had it not been for his mother's kind encouragement.

"Tell us what you think is the difference, dear Cecil," she said, smiling pleasantly upon him.

"I only know about myself, mamma," he said. "I think I feel," hesitating more from bashfulness than from doubt, "that it is only a pleasure to be strong and well, as I am just now, and able to go about with them all. But it is happiness to be all together, so many of us as there are, to know that papa and you are pleased with us," and in a low voice, "to feel that God loves us."

"Excellently well explained," said Mr Gordon. "And you see how it applies to what we said. The happiness of this our happy home lies in our having so many to love us, and whom we love; still more surely, still more deeply, lies in our having a God over all to care for us, to order all things concerning us, to teach us His will, to guide us in His paths while here, and to bring us safely to our home with Him at last. All this happiness we carry with us. True, God calls us away from some of our pleasures and enjoyments—such as our beautiful place, with its grass, trees, and hills—our large, pleasant house, with its comforts, elegancies, and conveniences. But cannot we give these up, at God's command, with-

out a murmur, when He so graciously leaves to us all our deeper and better happiness?"

"Only," said Agnes, with a sigh, "we cannot help feeling sorry to lose them, even if they be but pleasures."

"No, we cannot help it," Mrs Gordon said. "Nor does God wish that we should help it. He loves us so tenderly that He will not give us one pain, one sorrow, however small, more than He sees to be necessary. He tells us that 'He doth not afflict willingly.' When, in His tender concern and care for our good, He has sent a sorrow upon us, surely it will grieve and displease Him to see that we try to think nothing of it, to reason away or forget the pain He means us to feel, and so to lose the good He means that pain to work out for us."

"Yes, mamma, I see that," Agnes said, thoughtfully. "I am glad that God does not require us to feel no sorrow at leaving dear Eagle's Crag, for, indeed," the tears rising in her eyes, "I cannot help it."

"And, papa," asked Malcolm, "how do you make out the difference between pleasure and happiness in Bell and Nelly staying with us? Why do you say it is happiness, but not a pleasure?"

"Mamma must answer that question," said Mr Gordon, smiling. "It was she, not I, who said so. I do not understand why she said it. It seems to me, that to have faithful, zealous servants, like Bell and Nelly, must be a great pleasure, and a great comfort, as well as happiness."

"In that light it certainly is," she answered. "It is

an inexpressible comfort to have servants in whom one can perfectly trust, who will make our interests their own, who, as we know, will do behind our backs exactly as they would do before our faces. But there is another side of the question. Bell and Nelly must, at the cottage, put their hands to many kinds of work to which they are wholly unaccustomed. They are not young, are much attached to their own ways of doing things. I am afraid they will be fretted and worried by the unsettled, irregular style in which work must be got through in our new establishment."

"Why must?" asked Mr Gordon. "Why should not the less work of the cottage be done as regularly, and in as settled a way as the greater work of this large house?"

"That is all you gentlemen know of household work," Mrs Gordon said, laughing. "You have such fine theories of the advantages and possibilities of work being regular and exact. But if the door-bell rings while Bell is scouring a grate or scrubbing a floor, would you have her decline to answer it till she had quite and perfectly finished the work in hand? Or if Nelly is busy at her washing-tub, should you like her to keep us waiting for dinner till the clothes are all washed, and she is able to prepare it? It is this being obliged to leave one piece of work undone and go to another, which I fear may often a good deal vex and fret the tempers of our worthy maidens."

"I can fancy, too," said Mr Gordon, "that with their exalted ideas of the dignity and greatness of the Gordon family, it may be a severe and constant trial to them to

see us living in a style so different from what we have been used to."

"Yes, I am sure we shall have much difficulty in convincing them of the necessity for strict economy in everything. I hardly like to think what Nelly will feel when she finds out that I intend to stint the family in the consumption of butter, cream, sweetmeats, and such luxuries. And I do not know how Bell will ever be able to spread our breakfast or dinner-table without all its present elegancies of plate, glass, and china."

"But, mamma," cried Agnes, in dismay, "are we to be without plate, glass, and china altogether?"

Mrs Gordon could not help smiling at her evident consternation.

"Be satisfied, my dear," she said, cheerfully. "We shall not ask you to eat your food with your fingers, to drink water from the pitcher, or to make the table your plate. We shall have all that is necessary for decorum as well as comfort. Everything at Eagle's Crag—plate, glass, china, as well as other things—belongs to papa's creditors."

"To the creditors of Gordon and Co.," interrupted Lionel, proudly. "Papa has no creditors."

"Well, at least they do not belong to us. We cannot take them with us. There are a good many articles of the kind I have named at the cottage. And, besides, Uncle Colin has most considerately desired me to retain what I really require of the furniture, linen, plate, &c., here, and to leave him to make it good to the creditors. But when he has already done so much for us, we can-

not wish to make him do more than is necessary. We must learn to do without many things to which we have been accustomed. These are among the mere pleasures, mere enjoyments, which God bids us leave behind, my Agnes, and we must not murmur for their loss."

Again Agnes said, with a sigh—

" Still, mamma, I am glad that God does not forbid us to feel sorrow at losing them. I can't help feeling sad to think so many things we have always liked are to be taken away."

" Oh, as for that," cried Lionel, " I don't care the least for all the plate, china, or glass in the world. But to leave my darling Jet, never again to have a gallop on his back. Mamma, that is sore."

Agnes agreed that the loss of their dear ponies was a hundred times greater than the loss of any mere ornament to their table. Mr and Mrs Gordon entered upon a discussion as to various household arrangements, and the children, uninterested, wandered away to seek and caress the ponies, of whom their minds were now quite full.

These last days at Eagle's Crag were very sorrowful, but, fortunately, they were not many. As I have said, Mrs Gordon was anxious to remove to the cottage as soon as she could; and there was little to detain her. The furniture at Eagle's Crag was to be sold. The cottage was already furnished. And when she had chosen and got packed up the addition to its furniture, which the largeness of her family rendered absolutely indispensable, and had seen to the careful despatching

of the family pictures, which the creditors had given up to the family, and which a friend in Edinburgh undertook to keep for them, nothing more remained to be done, except to pay the last sorrowful visit to the many humble friends and dependents, to whom she and hers had, for fifteen long years, been such a blessing.

To part from them was a bitter drop in the cup of sorrow. Besides the pain of losing the pleasant intercourse which had been kept up with them, there was the added pang of knowing that many among them must sorely miss the help she had been used to give.

Of this loss no hint ever reached her ears from the losers themselves. With the delicacy of feeling by no means uncommon among the poor in the retired parts of Scotland, they were most of all anxious that their dear benefactress should never think of, nor grieve over this consequence of her own sorrow. They were even afraid to express their own grief at her departure, lest they should add another pang to hers.

“It wad ill set me to bring one tear more to her bright eyes,” said one old woman, after Mrs Gordon’s last visit to her, during which she had talked ceaselessly, breathlessly, of every imaginable topic, afraid lest anything should be touched upon which might overset her hard-won composure, might open the door to her so painfully-repressed tears.

And at all the other cottages so much was said about the good wages of the husband, about the usefulness of the children, about the plenty in the meal kist, the excellence of the pig, and the productiveness of the garden,

that, as Mrs Gordon told her husband, one might really suppose there had never existed a more comfortable, well-provided-for set of peasantry than was theirs.

Although such signs of good and tender feeling in her humble friends, by endearing them more to her heart, made it all the more painful to go out from among them, yet Mrs Gordon felt comforted by them ; as, indeed, all tokens of excellence in those we love must comfort us, both on our own account and on theirs ;—on their account, for every such excellence is a fresh security for their happiness and welfare ; on our own, for surely nothing is more refreshing, nothing more comforting, than to know that we have not been deceived in the characters of those to whom we have given our affection. In committing the case of her dependants to the Lord, and asking Him to provide for them, now that she could not, Mrs Gordon felt a quiet confidence that the unselfish, true feelings which the Lord had given them, must ever be to themselves a source of deep, unchangeable happiness.

Mrs Gordon had expected, and indeed hoped, that her husband might be spared the pain she had so bravely borne, of saying farewell to their tenants and dependants. She had unselfishly hoped that he might not return until they were fairly settled at the cottage ; but in this she was disappointed. He returned two days before the one fixed for their departure, and spent these two days in visiting every one who had the least claim upon his kindness.



CHAPTER IV.

ARE THE CHILDREN TO BE THE SUNSHINE OR THE CLOUD OF THEIR COTTAGE HOME ?

HE evening of what the children called the very last day was wet. But this proved in the end rather a happy circumstance, as it gave rise to a discussion which lasted for some time, and diverted their minds from the pain of these last hours.

Agnes declared that she was glad the evening was so gloomy. She could hardly have borne, she said, to think of leaving Eagle's Crag had it looked as lovely as it had done on many previous evenings. She was glad not to have one of its smiling looks to carry away with her as its last. She would far rather think of it as gloomy and dull in their absence.

Lionel and Malcolm, with more common sense than sentiment, loudly dissented from such a feeling. They were greedy, they said, of every morsel and scrap of pleasure that they could still get from their dear old home. That they must so soon lose its beauty and

pleasantness seemed to them the strongest reason for wishing to have that beauty and pleasantness in its highest perfection up to the very last moment. If they were to enjoy them no more after to-morrow, surely it was natural to wish to get every particle of enjoyment possible in the time that remained.

Mrs Gordon took part with Agnes, Mr Gordon with the boys ; and the discussion was carried on with great spirit. Mr Gordon and Lionel showed themselves very skilful in turning their adversaries' arms against themselves, and forcing them to abandon their own arguments by pushing them to an extreme length.

“ I suppose,” cried Lionel, after the contest had been maintained for some time, “ I suppose that you will tell us next that you are sorry that our dear old hills can be seen from the cottage : that you would rather never see them again, because you can no longer wander about among them.”

Agnes hardly accepted the consequence of her own arguments, and asserted that she was sorry their new home commanded a view of the hills,—that she should prefer never to see them again.

Here, however, her mother could not follow her.

“ I cannot be sorry—I can be nothing but very glad,” she said, “ to know that my eyes may often be refreshed by the beauty of our hills. Indeed,” she added, more seriously, “ I should think it not more foolish than wrong to refuse to enjoy the beauty God leaves us, because we have not all we once had. I must say, Agnes, that I should be sorry to refuse to admire the distant view of

our fine hills, beautiful as I know it is, merely because we can no longer dwell under their shadow."

"But, mamma," Agnes persisted, "when we look at them,—when we see the sun lighting up their rocks, and shining down into their green hollows,—how can we ever help thinking how beautiful our own home, with its lawns, and trees, and crags, must be looking in that light. How can we ever learn to forget its beauty?"

"But I don't wish to forget it, Agnes," Mrs Gordon answered, earnestly. "I should like to remember—to treasure up, if possible—every hour, every separate sight of beauty, which God has ever given us. I am sure we were not meant to forget them as soon as the moment of enjoyment was past. I am sure the memory of them is not less sweet than wholesome for the heart."

Agnes could not contradict this, and the discussion dropped. The boys said that Agnes was not worth arguing with, now that mamma had deserted her, and they turned to other matters.

Mrs Gordon finished a note she had been writing to the wife of their good clergyman. There were no envelopes to be found, and Agnes searched for sealing-wax and a seal, while Lionel went to get his mother a lighted taper.

When he had brought it in, and placed it beside her, he stood leaning on the back of her chair, watching Agnes, who was searching all the drawers of Mrs Gordon's writing-table for the missing wax. It was both a very pretty and very convenient writing-table. Lionel knew that it was to be left behind, with many more of

the comforts and elegancies to which his mother had always been accustomed ; and he lost himself in dreams of the delight of being old enough and clever enough to make a great deal of money, and buy back all these things for her. He awoke with a deep sigh to the consciousness that he was barely fourteen, with no prospect of being able to keep himself, much less his parents, for many years to come.

At sound of that sigh, Mrs Gordon looked quickly round from the sealing of her note.

“ Well, Lionel,” she said, kindly, and yet half playfully, “ that is a terrible sigh. May I know what called it up ? ”

“ Oh, it was only—I was only wishing that I were a regular grown-up man,” he answered, vehemently.

“ Indeed, Lionel ! ” said his father. “ And yet it seems to me that you have a wonderful capacity for enjoying a boy’s pleasures and amusements. I should hardly have fancied that you were yet tired of being a boy.”

“ It is not that,” he answered, too much in earnest to heed the slight raillery of his father’s tone ; “ but it is very hard to feel that I am quite useless—that I can do nothing to help you and them all ; that I cannot even earn my own bread.”

“ It is a good, healthy feeling, my dear boy,” his mother said, tenderly. “ I am glad that you feel it. But you must not exaggerate our poverty. God helping us, there will, I trust, be no want of bread, nor of more costly things than bread, in our new home. We thought that you had all understood this. Besides our good,

comfortable house and garden, for which we pay no rent, through Uncle Colin's kindness, we have my marriage-settlement left to us, which insures a comfortable and certain, if not a large income."

"And papa is going to write books, and make a great deal of money," said Agnes. "Are not you, papa?"

"I hope so," he answered, cheerfully; "I have an excellent prospect. I have fair promises of constant employment from more than one publisher. And you know, Lionel, I like the work."

"Still," he persisted, though less gloomily, "it does seem hard, mamma, that you should have so many boys to torment you, and not one to be a help."

"But why should my boys torment me?" she asked, gaily; "don't you know that some one calls children—boys as well as girls, I suppose—the sunshine of life?"

"Ah, but," shaking his head, with a smile, "some one else calls children 'the plague of life.'"

"Well, I suppose it lies with yourselves to choose whether you shall be the sunshine or the plague and cloud of our life. Will you not choose to be our sunshine?"

"If only we could," cried Lionel and Agnes in a breath.

Colin and Cecil had been playing at the fox and goose in a distant part of the room; but they left their game and came near, attracted by the earnestness of the speakers. And Cecil, looking wistfully in his father's face, repeated—

"If only we could."

"Of course you can, every one of you, even down to the very youngest," Mr Gordon said, in his quick, decided way.

"Down to the very youngest! O papa, even to Willie?" Agnes asked, doubtfully.

"Certainly to Willie," Mrs Gordon answered. "Yesterday, Willie and I were out in the park alone, sitting on the grass near the twin beeches. I was feeling very much worn out in body, sad and depressed in spirit. I suppose the little fellow found out that I was not attending to his long stories, for he stopped suddenly in his continuous flow of words, and coming up to me as I sat on the grass, he began to stroke my face with both hands, saying, compassionately, 'Poo' mamma, poo' mamma, Willie get something p'etty for poo' mamma.' And before I could speak he had hustled away, and was trotting busily to and fro among the grass, seeking for something p'etty. Presently he came back, one hand firmly closed. He opened it, and, presenting me with the crushed head of a daisy, said, triumphantly, 'There, mamma, there something p'etty for poo' mamma,' and darted off again to seek more. Of course the poor flower was crumpled out of all beauty, and yet I can hardly tell you how long I sat looking at it, and feeling how easy it is to bring cheering and comfort to a tired spirit, for indeed the kindness and sympathy of my two-year-old boy had brightened up my thoughts and feelings more than I could well understand."

"It is by kindness and sympathy, then, that you mean we should be sunshine to others?" Agnes questioned.

"By being loving, gentle, kind, and considerate," Mr Gordon replied; "by entering into the feelings of others, so as to halve every sorrow, to double every joy; by being watchful to smooth roughness, to remove difficulties out of the daily path of others; by seeing to it that by any means their daily life may be at least a little brighter, a little more pleasant, than it could have been without you."

"I should like that. I should like to be such sunshine," Agnes said, with glistening eyes.

"You should add also," Mrs Gordon observed, "by keeping your own spirit bright and contented. You children do not know how many clouds you bring over our sunshine by mere fretfulness and murmur. How often the dulness and gloom of a wet afternoon are increased tenfold by the dark melancholy faces, the complaining words with which it is accompanied! How much more painful is made the pain of refusing a request by the murmuring spirit, the sullen temper, with which the refusal is received! Or, how wearying out it is to both mind and body, when the difficult, tiresome lesson is met with sighs, and groans, and hot tears, instead of with the cheerful attention and diligence which could alone avail."

"Mamma, do I sigh and groan even over difficult lessons?" Agnes asked, half reproachfully. Being more entirely her mother's pupil than any of the boys, she supposed this last allusion was meant for her.

"No, my dear, you do not," was Mrs Gordon's instant answer; "you have a great power of steady application.

It is a talent for which to be grateful. I did not think of you ;" and she glanced smilingly at Colin. He turned away his head, colouring a good deal. He was a very idle young gentleman, one who seemed really to think that sighs, groans, and fretful complaints were more helpful in learning a lesson than all the grammars and dictionaries in the world.

" Well," again said Agnes, earnestly recurring to her father's description, " I should like dearly to be sunshine to you all."

" Yes, it sounds very pleasant as papa puts it," Lionel said, condescendingly. " All that is very well in its way, but I should like to do more for you than all that. There is not much real value in such things."

" You are utterly mistaken there, Lionel," said Mr Gordon ; " the presence or absence of sunshine in the home has more influence for good or evil upon every heart within that home than you can yet understand."

" Ah, dear Lionel," added Mrs Gordon, earnestly, " never undervalue the blessing of sunshine, natural or moral. Only look there!" and she pointed to the window.

The rain had ceased. Had the party in the drawing-room not been too much interested in their own conversation, they might, some time before this, have seen a slender thread of clearing stretching along between the straight clouds and the tops of the hills. Now it had spread into a broad belt of open sky, glowing in all the delicate tints of sunset, the pale yellow melting into that exquisite pale blue which no painter on earth ever yet

imitated, and the rich crimson passing over them in soft blushes, like waves of the sea. The sun, though near its setting, was still behind the cloud. But some rays, more enterprising than their brethren, had escaped from bondage, and, with the partiality peculiar to such rays, had darted straight down into a nest of greenness high up among the rocks, as if its bright, soft grass were all the more welcome, as contrasted with the gray, barren cliffs around. A young birch-tree hung over this nook. High up there an older tree would have known to keep its leaves still folded up in their protecting sheath ; but this one, with the rashness of youth, had taken advantage of the last few sunny days to spread forth all its glory of tender green. And there it was, so exquisitely bright, so inimitably graceful, as its slender branches moved gently in the slight breeze, shaking the glittering rain-drops from its leaves, and letting the sunshine play with them, and glance through them upon the wet, white bark of its trunk.

“Oh, how beautiful!” exclaimed all the children except Lionel. He gazed in eloquent silence. He had the eye and heart of a true artist. The beauty of nature always moved him too deeply for speech.

The father and mother pressed the lesson no further. They were content to let such a scene make its own impression—and they were right. The exquisite beauty of this natural sunshine sunk deep into the hearts of the children, and effectually prevented their forgetting what had been said about the beauty and pleasantness of moral sunshine.

The children took advantage of the improvement of the weather to refresh themselves with a run into the park. In spite of all Agnes had said, she enjoyed as much as any the brightness and freshness of every object after the rain, the sweet incense of perfume arising from the flowers, from the hedges, from the young foliage of the trees, even from the naked earth, steaming as it was with its plentiful supply of moisture. So pleasant and beautiful did everything look, that they wandered on unmindful of the hour. They did not return to the house until quite bed-time, and might not have returned then had not their parents come out to seek them.

“O mamma,” cried Agnes, as she ran forward to meet them, “if you could only have seen how beautifully the sun glinted down among the lime-trees at the rocky burn! Surely nothing is more beautiful than sunshine—it makes everything so beautiful!”

“It is to make our cottage home beautiful, is it not?” Mrs Gordon asked.

“Well, mamma, I hope so. I think we shall all try; and although no one may be able to do very much alone, I think we should manage to make a bright shining among us.”

By a curious coincidence, the chapter for that evening was the one in Exodus where is described how all the children of Israel gave help in preparing the work for the tabernacle, and where so often occur such words as “Every one whose heart stirred him up to the work.”

The previous evening the children had glanced over this chapter, and, as children do, had hastily decided it

would not be interesting. But when once their father had directed their attention to the fact that each one of the people was allowed and expected to work according to the ability with which God had blessed him, and how even the spinning of the women was said to be "according to the stirring up of their hearts in wisdom," and when he had applied this to their own newly-formed resolution, of bringing each, according to his or her ability, a share of sunshine to their home, the chapter assumed a new appearance, and was read with eager attention and interest.





CHAPTER V.

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL.

THE most pleasant plan for the following day would certainly have been, that the whole family should leave Eagle's Crag in the morning, when the bustle of an early breakfast might have distracted the children's thoughts, and shortened the scene of leave-taking. But business came in the way to detain Mr and Mrs Gordon until quite the evening. Nelly and Bell had gone to the cottage a day or two before to clean and prepare ; and Mary, with her three young charges, Blanche, Edward, and Willie, and a large assortment of boxes and bundles, were sent off in the family-coach soon after breakfast. There had been a talk of the older children's being sent with this detachment, to spare them the long, lingering day of painful expectation. But Mrs Gordon did not feel sure how they might behave in a strange place, in strange circumstances, without any of their accustomed occupations and amusements, feared they might get into mischief, or might interrupt and tease the servants in all the bustle of preparation ; and the children themselves, although

anxious to get away, and have done with all last scenes, preferred to go with their father and mother.

And in the end the day passed on better than might have been expected. The young people were seized with a desire to pay one more visit to the Witch's Apron, the scene of their May-day dinner. Mrs Gordon thought the plan hardly wise. She feared that their minds might dwell so much upon the bright happiness of that day—their last of unmixed enjoyment—as to make them less able to bear the final pang of going forth for ever from their beautiful home. But it turned out that the children had made a good choice. As it happened, this particular walk was one which they had not often taken, and in the course of it there were many new objects to attract their attention and amuse them. It was a long, scrambling walk. They were obliged to go briskly on all the way, in order to insure being back again by the dinner hour. There was no time for regretful loiterings in favourite spots. The final ascent was very difficult, at least for Agnes and Cecil; and the pleasure and excitement of overcoming the difficulty amused them, and raised their spirits more than they were aware of. Even when they had reached the place, and sat down to rest, there were so many distant objects to seek out, so many nearer ones to recognise from the new point of view, that there was little time for melancholy recollections to intrude. And although the words were often repeated, "Do you remember the day we spent on that rock?" or, "The first time we found out that green nook," and so on, yet the memories crowded so quickly

into a short space of time, that the full bitterness of no one was felt. Then there was the quick walk back ; and by the time they had reached the more home precincts of park and shrubberies, and were inclined to linger and look around, and sigh over past pleasures, the dinner-bell rung, and they were obliged to run the rest of the way.

After dinner Mrs Gordon had still some packing to get done, and she kept the children fully occupied, running up and down stairs on errands for her. At the very last they recollected that they had not yet bid good-bye to their kind old gardener and his wife, and a hurried walk to his cottage presented another, though sad, means of taking up time.

This farewell was only the first of many which had to be got through. When the carriage drove up to the door, and all was ready, the whole establishment of servants met in the hall, for the last looks, last words. They were all there, except the three at the cottage. Mr and Mrs Gordon had wished some at least to leave before this, that they might go to Edinburgh in search of other situations. But not one would consent to forego an hour of service which they could still render the master and mistress they so dearly loved. And the service of those last days had been more zealous and loving than I can describe.

As the children came down-stairs, and saw the long row of servants waiting to see them off, their first impulse was to rush past all, get into the carriage, and have done with the whole painful business. But when they saw

their mother, with her pale face, her quivering lips, and eyes full of sorrow, go from one to another to shake hands, say a last kind word, and ask to hear of their welfare, they felt ashamed not to follow her example ; and, in doing so, learned perhaps their first practical lesson in controlling their own emotions for the sake of others. They did not know how those last words and looks dwelt in the hearts of their servants ; how, even for years, the sympathy they had thus shown kept many a heart soft and warm, that might otherwise have grown hard and cold through contact with hard and cold natures.

At last the scene was over. They were all seated. The carriage door was closed. They were gone. Mrs Gordon sunk back in the corner. She did not weep, but she covered her eyes with her hand. The children could see that she prayed. The father sat looking out on every well-known object with a calm, grave countenance. And the children's tears and lamentations were checked by the presence of a sorrow, which they felt instinctively was immeasurably deeper than theirs.

Thus the first part of the journey was very sad and silent. But as Mr and Mrs Gordon were never long unmindful of the wants and feelings of others, so by the time they had got two or three miles on their road, and the most familiar and best loved objects had passed from their sight, they began to arouse themselves from their own mournful thoughts, to attend to and try to amuse their companions. And the children were very ready to be amused. The pain of leaving home had been so great

that they were naturally anxious to get relief from it, to forget it for a little if they could.

They began to ask questions about their new home. Hitherto they had felt little curiosity concerning it. It had been enough for them to know that they must leave Eagle's Crag. In comparison to that sorrow, everything else had seemed unimportant. If they could no longer live at Eagle's Crag, it signified little what kind of place they were to live in. But now that that dear home was fairly left behind, that the last bitter pang of leaving it was past, they became anxious and interested to know what lay before them. They had occasionally, though not often, passed through Knock Earn, but it had always been on their way to some more interesting place. They had observed little, and recollectcd nothing about it. Their own cottage, as it stood back from the principal street, they had never seen.

Mr Gordon said that, for a house in a town, their new home was singularly quiet and retired.

“There are no other houses in the lane in which it stands, except one or two of a humble kind at the far end,” he said. “In front there is a wide extent of garden with trees, belonging to one of the banks, which divides us most pleasantly from the streets above us ; and at the back there seems to be no human habitation between our sunny garden and the lovely strath, which stretches out to the Ochil Hills.”

“It is not in a street, then ?” Agnes said. “You said a lane.”

“Lane is hardly the right name, although street it certainly is not. It is a short broad piece of road, lying out of the way of all the streets, and is no thoroughfare. Although broad, straight, and level enough in itself, it terminates at each end in a steep, crooked, narrow ascent and descent, shunned by all drivers or horsemen who can avoid them ; so that we are free from much of the dust and noise we must have borne in any of the main streets.”

“But is it really a cottage ?” Colin asked, ever anxious about the dignity of the Gordons of Eagle’s Crag.

“Not a cottage like those about Eagle’s Crag, my dear, like the gardener’s or gamekeeper’s,” Mrs Gordon answered, smiling.

“No, mamma, of course not ; but is it a cottage like the one in which the Jardines used to live in summer, up the loch’s side ?”

“In front it looks not unlike theirs,” Mr Gordon said. “A broad, low, substantial-looking house, one story high ; but when you have walked in from the front door to the parlour window you will be surprised to find yourself a whole story above the ground. The hill-side on which it is built is so steep, the ground falls away so rapidly, that the house is a story deeper at the back than at the front. The dining-room is below the drawing-room, although the drawing-room is on a level with the street.”

“Then there are only back rooms down-stairs !” Agnes said.

“No, the kitchen and a kind of lumber-room are to

the front, looking into a little narrow area ; but this area is so narrow that it is easily overlooked on first going into the house. And, in order to give you a surprise, I chose to suppose that you would so overlook it."

"That lumber-room would not be a bad one if it had a larger window, and another entrance besides the one through the laundry," said Mrs Gordon. "I should like very well to have it for a school-room, instead of that small garret-room."

"Is our school-room in the garrets?" asked one or two voices, in dismay. There had been very small, unfurnished, and uninhabited attics at Eagle's Crag. To have a school-room at all like one of these seemed a dismal prospect.

Mr Gordon smiled at their horrified faces.

"Oh, it is by no means so despicable a place as you fancy," he said ; "the four boys are to sleep in the attics, and very well off they will be."

"Your lesson-books, slates, and so on, must be kept up in the garret school-room," Mrs Gordon added, "and you must be content to learn your lessons there when it is convenient that you should do so. But I dare say the greater part of the school-room work will be carried on in the drawing-room, or in papa's study."

"But where is papa's study?" Malcolm asked ; "there does not seem to be much room for it."

"There is a low wing entered from the dining-room, and containing two good rooms. One is to be our bedroom, the other a paradise of a study. It is so far from your noisy voices," Mr Gordon said, gaily.

"And is there really a pretty view from the back-windows?" Lionel asked.

"Pretty! It is beautiful. Out over one of the finest straths in Scotland with its rich woods and fields, to the whole range of the Ochil Hills. And so wide is the view that if there be shadow and gloom in one part, there is most likely sunshine and brightness in some other."

"But, papa, you said we could see our own hills too?" Lionel pursued, anxiously.

"Yes, and a beautiful sight there is of them. These lesser hills now around us, coming down in wooded terraces from the Grampians, sweep round to meet the Black hill opposite there with its crown of trees. Between them they seem from our windows to narrow the valley to a perfect point, and the vacancy left by their descent is beautifully filled up by the range of our own rugged Eagle's Crag hills. The contrast between their bare, wild rocks, and the soft wooded outline of the foreground heights, is exquisitely beautiful."

By and by they came out from among the hills and saw the town straight before them at the top of a hill up which the road wound gently. Before beginning the ascent they passed over a low bridge, and directed by Mr Gordon, looking up the river, their eyes were gladdened by the sight of a beautiful wooded glen, opening up a fine vista of rugged heather hills most refreshing to the hearts of the mountain-loving children. The carriage wound slowly up towards the town, under

a broad hillside, with all its variety and beauty of outline and shade, with its scattered groups and lines of trees, and its cultivated fields contrasting with the wild, heather-covered summit, near which could be seen a deep black corry, at once attracting the eyes and interest of the young people.

Those who sat backward could now see the fine view their father had described of the Eagle's Crag range rising behind the wooded foreground. But beautiful as it was, they could not just yet look happily upon it. It recalled too vividly their own dear home lying deserted and quiet under the shadow of these hills. They all turned to the other side to plan pleasant walks upon the lesser hill, or, as in the language of the country it is called, Knock, upon which the town stands. The Knock is well covered with trees and sunny sloping fields, pleasant-looking and home-like. And when their father had told them of the broad grass walk among the trees, open to every inhabitant of the town, the boys and Agnes began to entertain thoughts of pleasant summer days spent there, even though Eagle's Crag was no longer theirs.

And now they had reached the town, and the young eyes glanced eagerly from side to side to gather up all they could. Altogether it was rather satisfactory. There is no great beauty about Knock Earn in itself; and yet it has an old-fashioned, picturesque look which is very pleasant. And, from its position on the side of a hill, one cannot go many yards without catching glimpses of the wide prospect which surrounds it on every side,

and of which the steep cross streets are **every now and then** affording more satisfactory views. Down one of these cross streets the travellers turned—so narrow, so steep and crooked, that the passage seemed not free from danger to the unwieldy family coach. Round a sharp corner, a step or two more, and the **cottage** stood before them.

Dingy and small enough it looked certainly in eyes accustomed to Eagle's Crag. But there was no time for regret or comparison. Almost before the coach stopped, the front door was opened, and Bell came out on the door-step to receive them.

Mrs Gordon had aroused herself from her own grief for the sake of her children, and she was therefore now able to understand and answer all the varied feelings so plainly expressed in the good woman's broad, honest face. The happiness of seeing them again, the deep mortification of welcoming them to such a home, and the anxiety, even dread, as to the state of suffering in which she might find them—Mrs Gordon understood and felt for it all. She greeted Bell with her own smile of frank kindness, asked how she and Nelly had got on, hoped that they had not overworked themselves, and stopped in the lobby to admire and praise the cleanliness and order of everything; to express her surprise and thanks that they had got through so much.

Bell's face brightened at every word. It was so pleasant to know that her diligence and zeal were thoroughly appreciated; to feel that they had not been in vain, but had really brought comfort and pleasure to the mistress.

for whom she had worked so hard ; and it was an inexpressible relief to find that mistress in a state to receive pleasure or comfort from anything.

I do not know in precisely what condition the three servants had expected to find their mistress. Perhaps weeping and wringing her hands, or fainting in the arms of her husband. Certainly not, as was the case, able to step briskly from the carriage, to come up the steps unsupported, to look round and note cheerfully every improvement that had been effected since her last visit. The three had during the day had many serious talks upon the matter, in low, earnest voices, with sad, anxious looks. Mary had gladly taken advantage of the early sleepiness of the little ones after their day of excitement to get them to bed, feeling certain that their mother would be utterly unable to attend to, or even to take notice of them. And while Bell had summoned all her courage and resolution to be able to do her duty in opening the door, Nelly stood half-way up the stairs from the kitchen, listening earnestly, and yet afraid to hear ; longing to catch a glimpse of her dear lady's face, and yet actually trembling with apprehension as to what she might see. The surprise and relief to the three attached hearts were instant and great. Nelly only waited to make sure that these cheerful, hearty words really came from her mistress, before she ran down-stairs to make tea ready, with actual tears of gratitude dimming her eyes.

Again were Agnes and the boys almost unconsciously influenced by their mother's attention to the feelings of

others. They checked their first hasty rush to see the house ; and, while Agnes followed her mother into the nursery to help her to take off her travelling dress, the boys turned back to give what help they could in unpacking the carriage, and carrying the carpet-bags and boxes to their respective rooms. They did not know how much sunshine they poured into the first hour in their new home by this mere exercise of kindly thought and consideration. And it was so easily done, so pleasant to do.

It was easy and pleasant to Agnes to go quietly about her mother, loosening her cloak, unlacing her boots, fetching her slippers, while Mrs Gordon rested comfortably in the nursery arm-chair, hearing all Mary had to tell about the little ones ; and it was a happiness to the mother to be thus tenderly waited upon.

Malcolm's hearty "Take care, Bell, you will hurt yourself ; let me help you," and the accompanying service cost him little, but were pleasant and refreshing to the poor tired woman. And when Lionel ran forward to the heads of the horses to keep them steady while George was in a dangerous position on the roof of the coach ; and Colin caught him by the arm when he stumbled on the stairs, and said, anxiously, "O George, your poor lame ankle, have you hurt it ?" their observation of his position, their anxiety for his safety, sent a glow of comfort to his heart, even in that sorrowful moment.

It was a moment very full of sorrow to the old coachman ; the last time he should ever drive, perhaps the

last time he should ever see, the master whom he had loved from a boy, whose first pony he had bought, into whose hands he had first put a bridle. A situation had been procured for him, and a good one; but it was in a distant part of the country. He could hardly hope ever to come across any of his beloved Gordons of Eagle's Crag again. Greatly did he envy Pearson, who had been engaged as butler by a gentleman who lived near Knock Earn; and still more did he envy Mrs Morgan, the envied of all the Eagle's Crag servants. For Mrs Morgan was not going to service again. She had ample means to keep her comfortable through all her life, even if it should be an unusually long one. She had resolved to find a house for herself in Knock Earn; and she was only to wait at Eagle's Crag until the creditors were fairly in possession before she came to settle for life where she might hope to see some of the dear family every day; where she should be at hand to give help in times of sickness or sorrow, and to be ever and always doing something to lighten her mistress's labours or difficulties. The contrast between her lot and his own was full in poor George's mind as he stood giving his master that long, lingering, last shake of the hand.

It was the second time that day that he and his horses had been at the cottage, for he had refused to allow any one else to drive any member of the family. And, afraid that he might be tired, Mr Gordon tried to persuade him to come in for some refreshment. But George would not. It would be dark enough, he said, before

he got the horses home to their stable. His wife would be expecting him, and be alarmed if he delayed. These were the reasons he gave. But Mr Gordon guessed that the real cause of his haste was a wish to save Mrs Gordon the pain of saying good-bye. And he was right.

“My poor, dear mistress has had enough of it already,” the kindly old man thought. And with fearful glances at the still open door, he shook hands hastily with the boys, one more heart-speaking grasp of Mr Gordon’s offered hand, and he was on his box, the reins gathered up, the horses started, the corner turned, and he was out of sight, just as Agnes, startled by the sound of wheels, came running to the door to speak the last words to him.

For a moment she felt disappointed; but in the next she was glad to have been spared that one other pang. Slowly and silently they turned into the house. Mr Gordon followed, and closed the front door.

At the sound of its closing every heart seemed to revive. True, it shut out their old home, but it also shut in their new one. The worst was over, the past was done with. There were no more last words to be said, no more last sorrowful looks to wring their hearts. And with freshened spirits they all turned to what was before them.

And now the house was to be seen; they were eager to go over it.

“Is there time before tea, mamma?” asked Mr Gordon, looking into the parlour, where Mrs Gordon, calm,

and even cheerful, was putting sugar into cups, and cutting bread.

“Yes, if you make haste,” was the answer; and guided by their father they ran through the rooms. To be sure, there were not many; the business could not be tedious.

There were four rooms on the first floor, two on each side of the lobby. On the right side of the front door was a bed-room for Agnes, a neat, pleasant room, with gray paper on the walls, a dark-green carpet, to form a good contrast, and a large bed with white curtains, which, to Agnes’s great delight, was to be shared with Blanche. The window looked towards the town. But above the houses, two peaks of the Grampians rose bold and broad to meet the sky; grand and beautiful they were at all seasons, under every aspect, whether lying calm and blue under the summer sun, standing up black and rugged to meet the winter storms, or brightening and darkening under the quick flashing light and shade of a breezy day. Oh! who that has not enjoyed it can tell the delight of having a bold mountain-side within sight of your home, to be seen at any hour, in any weather; as now it stands back distant and calm, its shades and tints lightly, delicately drawn; and again comes so near that you can look into every green nook, fancy you can measure every gray rock, count every bunch of heather; when the black, sharply-outlined shadows fly over it, you know not from whence, and glorious bursts of sunlight flash and fade ever and again, you know not why, dimpling its face with smiles that speak to the very heart. This particular evening was grave and gray, and

the sun was already down; but the atmosphere was clear and dry, and light enough remained to show Agnes how many a charm and delight were stored up for her in the view from that small bed-room window.

Opposite Agnes's room was the sleeping nursery—a good enough room, but so small, and so well filled up by the large bed for Mary and Willie, and the cot for Ned, as to make it absolutely necessary to set apart another room for nursery meals and nursery play. This second nursery was on the same side of the passage as the other, looking to the south, sunny and cheerful.

Opposite it was the parlour, really a lightsome, pleasant room, but very small, inconveniently so, considering the eight children who might be expected to congregate within its four walls. As Mr Gordon sometimes laughingly said, it was impossible to get about without stumbling over or treading upon some of them. The parlour window, as we have already heard, commanded a lovely view.

Opposite the front door were two staircases, one leading up-stairs, the other down. Narrow, steep, and quaint they were, without a pretension to balustrade or ornament of any kind. But a large window, looking to the south, divided its favours impartially between them—a half to each flight—and made both lobby and stairs more light and cheerful than is often the case in small houses.

Up-stairs there were three attics, a door at each end of the short passage, one in the middle. This middle room was entered first: it was the despised school-room.

And to be sure its claims to respect or admiration were by no means great. The rooms on each side were really good, large, airy, and cheerful ; but this one, besides being shorter, had the whole width of the staircase and passage taken from its breadth ; the roof began to slope from the very door ; it seemed as if two full-grown people could not stand upright in it at one time. It was low-roofed, narrow, miserable ; the children said, a pigeon-house, a rat-hole, never a school-room. All that could be done had been done to make it comfortable and convenient, if not cheerful. Capacious book-shelves had been put up at each end, and a broad sloping board, covered with green baize, ran all along the wall under the window, to serve as writing or reading desk ; but none of these things could reconcile the young people to the poor-looking place. The only comfort lay in recollecting that mamma had said that they should not be required to be much in it.

The boys' room looked magnificent in comparison, and met with the approbation it deserved. The two beds, broad and comfortable, stood back under the lowest part of the roof, leaving a wide space in front for the four boys to roam about in. There was something barrack-like and free in the look of the room, which took their fancy more than a much prettier and more elegant apartment could have done. And then the window ! It was only a skylight, it is true ; but such a skylight ! A skylight commanding such a view as few princes on earth can boast of. What if you had to mount upon a chair, and put your head quite out of the window before

you could see it, was not the sight, when obtained, worth ten times as much trouble as that amounted to? So picture-loving Lionel thought, as he stood looking round from east to west, and back to east, making the most of the faint light that he had, and fancying how hills, woods, and fields would look in the glorious noonday sun, under the early morning or late evening glow. The others had examined the third attic, Bell and Nelly's possession, gone down-stairs, and gone over kitchen and laundry, before he could tear himself away and join them.

The kitchen looked like a closet, after the great barn of a place at Eagle's Crag; but it was bright and comfortable, with the clean hearty-looking Nelly to brighten it up. The laundry was larger, and more convenient, and there were an excellent larder and pantry between the two rooms. But for such matters the children cared little. The dining-room and their papa's study were far more interesting.

The dining-room looked the same way as the parlour, but being a story lower, of course the view was not so fine. The little hedge of the garden, however, came close up to it, and gave it a pleasant, quiet home look.

Through the dining-room was the entrance to the wing—the parents' bed-room, the largest and best room in the house, looking to the south: and through it again what Mr Gordon called a paradise of a study. He threw open the door with a flourish. The children thronged eagerly to get the first peep.

"O papa," in various accents of disappointment, was at first the only comment.

A large, perfectly bare room, with walls and wood-work which had never known paper or paint; and a window which, from the sloping nature of the ground, although at some distance from the floor of the room, was yet on a level with the road, into which it looked. Such was Mr Gordon's paradise.

"What a room! what a window!" exclaimed Agnes. "Why, papa, you can see nothing but the dusty road, or that dark, gray wall opposite."

"From this corner I can see your beautiful hill-tops," he answered, laughing, and squeezing himself into the corner; "I can leave the door open, and look out of the bed-room window if I please. But I shall be so busy here in this nice quiet place, that I shall not have time for looking out of windows."

"Busy with what, papa?" asked Lionel.

"Writing books, my boy," with the animation he always displayed in speaking of his future employment.

"O papa," Agnes cried, "they will be such stupid books written in this horrible place; nothing but dull, dingy thoughts can come to you here. You must not write your books here; you must go to the hillside to write."

"Perhaps I may go to the hillside to seek fresh and beautiful thoughts when I want them, Agnes," he said, smiling; "but they must be worked out and written down in this charming quiet den."

"But may we be with you when you go to the hillside

to seek beautiful thoughts?" Cecil asked. "I should like to see them come."

"Come flying down from the skies, or springing up from the flowers, eh, Cecil?" Malcolm asked, laughing.

"From both, I hope," Mr Gordon answered, more seriously. "I should like to get fresh and beautiful thoughts from every sight of beauty with which the Lord blesses me. But, Cecil, I hardly know how the thoughts would have time or freedom to come with you young ones running about my feet, chattering in my ears."

"Could no thoughts come springing up from us?" Malcolm asked.

"Strange, perplexed, entangled thoughts, I am afraid," Mr Gordon answered, laughing, "if you are all to be present while they are springing."

They had passed through the dining-room, and reached the foot of the stairs. Colin ran up before them, and coming down again on his hands and feet, in imitation of a monkey, cried out—

"What kind of a thought am I like, papa?"

"Nothing very beautiful. But take care, my boy," catching hold of him; "you will tumble down and break some of your bones; and to have to nurse and keep in bed a restless, fidgety piece of goods like you, could suggest thoughts of no very pleasant nature."

They all laughed. The servants in the kitchen heard the cheerful sound, and, looking at each other, said, "How soon children forget!" They were mistaken.

The children had not forgotten. Even as they entered the parlour, their tea-table at Eagle's Crag rose vividly before them, with all its pleasant accompaniments, the large, lofty room, the many windows coming down to the ground, the handsome furniture. A good many sighs were drawn, faces sobered a good deal, as they sat down to this one so different. But they were unsentimentally hungry. Sorrow and expectation had injured their appetites at dinner, and now, in making hearty amends, less substantial matters were forgotten. Their minds soon went back to the mingled amusement and mortification of finding papa's paradise of a study so different from what they had expected.

“You can't think, mamma, what a bare, miserable place it is,” said Agnes.

“My dear, you forget I came over here last week, and examined every corner of the house to see what was wanted.”

“But,” she persisted, “papa can never write or study in that bare, unfurnished room.”

“Oh, for furniture, that is easily managed. We have bought back part of the furniture of the Eagle's Crag study, as much as is necessary, or as the room will hold. We expect it to arrive in two or three days, as soon as Pearson and Mrs Morgan can get it sent off.”

“But the walls, mamma, so dirty, so stained and ugly,” said Malcolm.

“True,” she answered, looking at her husband, “I am vexed about the walls. I engaged the painter of the town to have them papered and painted before we came;

but they are all so dilatory. Bell says no one has even come."

"Oh, don't vex yourself about it," he answered, gaily
"I mean to paper it myself, I mean to begin to-morrow
"You, papa! Oh no."

"Oh yes, Colin, indeed I mean to do it. Are you shocked? Is it dreadfully lowering to a Gordon Eagle's Crag to paper his own room?"

"But, papa, are not you joking? Can you paper room? Do you know how?" Agnes asked.

"Certainly; I have done so before now."

"Where? When? At Eagle's Crag? Which room?" they asked eagerly.

"Not at Eagle's Crag itself. But the parlour and bedroom of the pretty cottage in the dell where the Grahams live were papered by my own hands."

"Oh, I remember them. But the paper is dingy and tattered," Agnes said.

"That is not my fault. It was neither dingy nor tattered when I put it up. But as that was when I was about Malcolm's age, it could hardly be expected that it should continue very fresh or clean until now."

"But why did you do it, papa?"

"To give a pleasant surprise to a particular *protégé* of mine, a poor Englishman, whom I had found, wearied, wayworn, and faint from hunger, in the hill-road from Glen Artney one summer evening."

"And what did you do with him? What was a Englishman doing there?" asked two of the boys at once.

"I do not remember his story distinctly, or how he had got out of work. But so it was : he had come here seeking employment, and, knowing nothing of the geography or people of the country, he had been wandering about aimlessly, helplessly ; getting up into the wilds among the Gaelic speakers, unable to understand or make himself understood, bewildered, perplexed, I really believe frightened, at their wildness and uncouthness, he had got completely helpless and desperate, and was wandering over the hills when I met him, he knew not from whence, or to where."

"And what did you do with him ?"

"Took him home to my mother. When she and Pearson had fed him, and nursed him back to health,—for, poor fellow, he was really dying with hunger,—they found out that he was a gardener by trade, gave him work in our garden ; and when he proved both diligent and clever, the place of under-gardener, which was vacant, was offered to him. Then it turned out that he had an attraction in England, a sweetheart, for whose sake he had been in such haste to get rich as to adopt any wild scheme for seeking profitable employment that presented itself. It was near my thirteenth birthday. I asked my father to give me that empty cottage for Richards as my birthday present. My mother gave him some furniture, and we sent him away to bring home his Lucy. I was anxious to make the house look bright for her, and took a fancy to have the bed-room and parlour papered. I had money to buy the paper, but not enough to pay for its being put up. My mother had given as much as

she thought right. So I took courage, got directions from a clever, good-natured carpenter of ours, who understood the matter, and papered them myself."

"And were they ready in time? Was he very much pleased?"

"Extraordinarily pleased. I hid myself behind the parlour window, that I might hear what he should say. And I can still recollect the cry of joy and surprise he gave as he led his wife in. It was a pretty paper, small green leaves on a paler green ground; and, I can assure you, looked remarkably well."

Lionel gave a deep sigh.

"Well, Lionel, my boy," said his father, laughing, "do you sigh, like Colin, over the degradation of a Gordon of Eagle's Crag condescending to paper a room?"

"No indeed," Lionel cried, vehemently, "as if a Gordon of Eagle's Crag could be so easily degraded!"

"Bravo, my boy. Why, you think more of us than even Colin."

"But, Lionel, why then did you sigh?" his mother asked, looking anxiously at him.

"I did not know I sighed, mamma," he answered; "but if I did, I suppose it was," hesitating a little, "because I was feeling that we could no longer give cottages to those who want them."

"True, but in the meantime we know of no one who does want one. For the present at least, if we have not the cottage, so neither have we any one to whom to give it," Mr Gordon said, cheerfully.

"But, papa," Lionel pursued with some impatience,

"it is a grief to be no longer able to help people, no longer able to do good."

"If to give away cottages or money be our only way of helping people or of doing good, then indeed our case is a sorrowful one," he answered, gravely; "and that not because we have no cottages or money to give, but because we are fit for no higher kind of usefulness."

"I don't understand you," Lionel said, still impatiently.

"Surely, my boy, you do not think that our duty to our neighbour lies merely in ministering to his bodily wants. Has he not a heart, feelings, temper, to be cared for, to be attended to? Is not his happiness often more affected by their state than by any bodily want or suffering? Are not we as able to minister to him in these things as ever we were?"

"Ah but, papa," Agnes observed, "it was so pleasant to give to those who wanted."

"Certainly. And that is a pleasure which God in His kindness has bestowed upon us for many years past. Let us thank Him heartily for all that past pleasure. And now that He has seen fit to lift us out of the money-giving class, let us be cheerfully willing that He should do all His pleasure, and only look more earnestly to the kind of ministration He has left us, and requires from us."

"Indeed," Mrs Gordon said, earnestly, "I often think that it is well for us that we have been taken out of the money-giving class. When we can at once by the gift of money, or of money's worth, relieve the wants of

those around us, we are too apt to forget that anything more is required. When we can help only by sympathy, tenderness, and consideration, I hope, I trust, that we shall learn to be more sympathising, tender, and considerate."

"And further," added Mr Gordon, "we must remember that while we are not often called upon to make a man happy by giving him a cottage, no hour or half-hour of the day passes, on which we cannot minister to the heart and feelings of some one beside us."

"And what became of Richards?" asked Cecil.

"He remained with us some years, and then got an excellent situation at Lord Colville's down here at St Michael's. You have seen him, children. He comes to me whenever he can."

"Ah yes, I remember now. It was he who gave me my beautiful Odarata rose," cried Agnes. "My darling Odarata, who will take care of you now?"

Other favourite plants and trees were recalled, and fondly dwelt upon by all the children. The father and mother did not check the flow of recollection. They did not expect, nor even wish, their children to forget past pleasure. They only aimed at keeping down all murmur, all that could unfit them for present duty.





CHAPTER VI.

PAPERING THE STUDY.

HE next morning, immediately after breakfast, Mr Gordon announced his intention of going up to the town to buy paper for his study, and invited any of the older children that chose to accompany him. The invitation was eagerly accepted by all five, and they set off at once.

The master of the shop was a good deal amused when the business was explained to him, and with great good nature brought forth his whole store that the children might have a fair choice. Agnes had set her heart upon having just such a green paper as her father had chosen for his first essay in room-papering ; but none such was to be found, and Mr Gordon consoled her for the disappointment with the assurance that the oak pattern they had chosen was really better suited for the room with its one small window, and would harmonise better with his study carpet than the darker green would have done. Mr Gordon knew the exact size and height of his room, and had calculated *how much* paper would be required ;

but the shopman advised him to take two whole pieces, lest he should make any mistake, or meet with any accident, and to return what was left over. He undertook to send it down in the course of the forenoon ; but Mr Gordon said he meant to begin work directly, and that he had plenty strong young porters of his own. So a large heavy roll was intrusted to each of the two older boys, and they were sent off, the twins attending to give assistance in case of emergency. Mr Gordon and Agnes remained behind to buy a brush and some of the proper kind of paste, or size ; and by the time they reached the cottage, the boys had safely deposited their loads on the study floor, and were dragging in the high set of steps from one of the outhouses. Mr Gordon began the work without delay. The children stood by to watch and help as they could.

It looked pleasant and easy. The paper was laid on its face on the floor, while Mr Gordon with broad steady sweeps of his brush covered the back with paste. Next, with a little help from the most careful of the youngsters, he carried the one end up the steps, adjusted it exactly to the cornice of the roof, and then passing a flat stick steadily and evenly down the surface of the paper, caused it to adhere to the wall smooth and straight through all its length. He got on so quickly and happily with breadth after breadth, that the boys thought they too could paper a room, and were eager to try. He doubted their competency.

“ But, papa, you were only my age when you first tried it,” objected Malcolm.

“True ; but I spoiled many a foot of paper, and wasted a great deal of time, before I succeeded. Just now we have neither paper nor time to spare. However, if you are very anxious about it, I shall allow Lionel, as the most careful, to try first. If he fails, no one else must ask for permission. Here, Lionel, I have finished the wall upon which the light falls ; you may try up here in the dark corner.”

Lionel was secretly convinced that he should show that his work could bear the full light ; but, glad to try in any place, he began confidently. In the very beginning he found the business not quite so simple as he had supposed. His paste ran into ridges and blotches. He could not make the surface so smooth as Mr Gordon did. Even with his father’s efficient help, the pasted paper was not got up the steps without a good deal of trouble. He thought that he had taken sufficient care to fit the upper edge to the cornice. True, there was the slightest possible line of wall seen above it at the one side, while at the other it curled up upon the roof about the eighth of an inch. But the difference was so slight, it could not signify. High up there no one could see it. Perhaps not. But as the upper edge had been cut exactly at right angles to the sides, so, if it were not straight, neither could they be straight. A slender crack began to appear between Lionel’s breadth and the straight one which Mr Gordon had just finished. A few inches farther down, and the crack had widened so as to become very perceptible. Lionel pulled at his paper to make it straight, pulled first gently, then more strongly,

at last with impatient force, and the fragile wet paper yielding, tore across from side to side. Lionel let the torn end fall from his hands, and stood looking down at his father, flushed, vexed, mortified. He had felt so sure he could do it beautifully.

“Never mind, there is no great harm done,” Mr Gordon said, laughing. “We must square off this torn edge and begin again. You will be content now to leave the work to me.”

Lionel came down from his elevated position, very well content to have done with it. He watched with more interest than before, while Mr Gordon, with what he called a square, measured and cut the paper. Although called a square, there were in truth only two straight flat pieces of wood, joined at right angles to each other, forming the two sides of a square. When one was pressed close to the side of the paper, the other lay across, and Mr Gordon, cutting by its edge, knew that the end of his paper was exactly at right angles to the side.

“I see now why you are so exact about the cutting,” said Lionel. “I did not think of that before. Of course the roof is at right angles to the walls; and if your paper be not exactly straight along the top, the sides will slope to one side or other.”

“Yes,” said Mr Gordon. “And when I am quite sure that the paper has been properly cut, and fitted quite exactly to the roof, I can run my brush quickly down, in all security that I shall come right at the end.”

“I have seen a paper that did not come right all the

way down," remarked Cecil. "Don't you remember, Agnes, in the Jardines' cottage, a paper in one of the bed-rooms runs crookedly down half the wall, and then there is a bulge or a plait on one side to make it come right again."

"The man who papered that room could not have been a faithful workman."

"Not careful, at least," suggested Lionel.

"Not faithful," persisted Mr Gordon. "A man is paid to put up the paper quite exactly; and if he does not take care to do so, he cheats his employer."

"Perhaps he did it for love, as you did, papa," Malcolm said, laughing.

"Well, if he did, he was equally bound to take pains to do it in the very best way. Even in works of love, we ought not by carelessness to suffer defects in our work, which may prove a continual eyesore and annoyance to the friend for whom we work. I could fancy that a crooked, bulging paper might take a good many little morsels of sunshine out of the temper of a particular, fidgety inhabitant of the room. We have no right to trifle with the sunshine of any one's temper."

"Could such a small thing interfere with any one's sunshine?" Malcolm asked, doubting.

"Oh, indeed, I think it could," Agnes answered. "I know that quite a large bit of sunshine was carried out of my temper this morning, when I found that my work-box, which I had packed so carefully, had been turned upside down, and that everything was thrown into disorder."

The boys laughed at her. Work-box troubles were quite out of their way, beyond their sympathy. Lionel thought that she might have kept faster hold of her sunshine, that she ought not to have suffered it to slip away so readily.

“Well,” said Mr Gordon, smiling, “when the accident happens to ourselves of course, all we can do is, as Lionel says, to keep fast hold of our sunshine, and make light of the matter. But it is best to be very careful never to be the cause of such accidents to others, as we do not know how slippery and fly-away their sunshine may be, and cannot calculate how much or how little our carelessness may take from them.”

“I know,” said Colin, laughing, “that to have muddy footprints on the wax-cloth or stair-carpet brings a fearfully black cloud over Bell’s temper.”

“Well, and if by merely scraping and rubbing our shoes before we come into the house, we can keep a cloud, great or small, out of any one’s temper, is it not inexcusable to omit doing it?” Mr Gordon asked.

“Still,” Lionel persisted, “it is so abominably foolish to allow one’s sunshine to be clouded by such trifles. No one but a fool can, I am sure.”

“Yes, indeed, some besides fools can, and do,” Agnes cried. “You know Lady Scott, whom every one loves, every one admires; mamma says that it makes her quite uncomfortable, quite irritable, to see books or work lying littering in wrong places, when she is not able to rise and put them away; and yet she is no fool, Lionel, you must allow.”

"No fool in other things perhaps, I allow; but certainly a fool in this. Now, papa, what do you say?"

"Very much what I said before. It is best for you and for me to have as few pet annoyances as we can help, so as to expose our sunshine to the fewest possible risks of getting overclouded by the daily accidents of life; and, at the same time, best to take very good care not to bring accidents or clouds upon others when we can possibly avoid it. For instance, Colin, as we know that there is at present quite sufficient work to be done in this household, and that to be overworked is by no means good for any one's temper, so I think it might be as well if the contents of that pot of paste were not poured over your clothes."

Colin laughed, but laid down the pot with which he had been playing somewhat carelessly. The papering went on with great rapidity and success. As there were three doors in the room, the surface to be covered was not great, and by the time Mrs Gordon came to summon them to an early dinner, the last breadth of paper was being fastened down, the youngsters were busy collecting the scraps, and rolling up what was over of the left piece of paper.

"O mamma, doesn't it look well!" Agnes cried, running to meet her. "So clean and bright, is it not?"

"It is indeed, my dear. I only wish we could have got the wood-work painted."

"Oh," said Mr Gordon, gaily, "if wishes were horses, beggars might ride; but, as they are not, the beggar must trudge on foot as cheerily as may be. We shall

do exceedingly well in the meantime, and when we grow rich, why, then we shall have our doors painted sky-blue scarlet if you like."

"Sky-blue scarlet! O papa, how horribly ill that would look," cried Colin.

"If there were such a colour it might," said Agnes. "But, mamma, is papa to have the carpet that was in the Eagle's Crag study—the Turkey carpet?"

"Yes, my dear, if it is not too large."

"Oh, then, I hope so much it won't be too large," she said, eagerly. "The bright, rich colours will do so beautifully with this paper. Papa, you were quite right; I am quite glad now that we did not get a green paper."

"If I were to take up the wishing business," said Mr Gordon, "it would be to wish that the carpet were here, and laid down, and the room quite ready for me. I don't know what I shall do for the next day or two; I don't at all like to be idle."

"Nor do I like you to be idle," said Mrs Gordon.

"Are you so impatient for me to begin making money?" he asked, laughing.

"Not exactly. But here you have no settled occupation or interest. You have led such an active, busy life, it will be very tiresome, very trying for you to wander about for some days idle, and not knowing what to set about."

"To be sure it will, trying to both spirits and temper. And as our sunshine of spirit is given us for the good of others quite as much as for our own good, so we have

no right to expose it to more danger than necessary. I must begin to work at once. Suppose you give me the dining-room until my own room is ready?"

"No, I have a better plan than that. Much peace you could have in the dining-room, while Bell and I are running out and in putting your study to rights. How should you like to take possession of the much-abused school-room for a day or two? I don't intend that lessons should be begun until next week. Bell has carried up your desk and books, and really it looks pretty snug. It will be quiet too."

"O mamma," shouted several of the children at once, before Mr Gordon could answer, "to send papa away to such a hole!"

"Indeed, papa," added Colin, "there will be wonderfully little sunshine to be found in that little dark place."

"But have not I told you that I shall be too busy to look round me at anything. If I have room to write, and light enough to write by, the dark little hole will do as well as a palace. So long as you leave me at peace in the serene altitudes of authorship, my sun will shine brightly and cheerily enough in any little dark hole; but if you boys get into rows and troubles, and mamma is obliged to summon me to set you right, then I shall come rolling down black as a thunder-cloud, fierce as a tiger. So beware, I have warned you in time."

"Oh," cried Colin, laughing, "I should like of all things to see you black as a thunder-cloud, fierce as a tiger. I think I shall try."

“Better not,” Mrs Gordon suggested. “When once the thunder-cloud gathers it is not so easily dispersed. Better keep the sky clear as long as we can.”

“But, papa,” said Malcolm, “before you get up into the altitudes from which you are not to be called down, suppose that you give us a regular afternoon of enjoyment. Suppose you and mamma go out with us, and let us stay out on the Knock this lovely day until tea-time.”

“I can suppose that easily enough. But to do it is something quite different,” he began, but the torrent of voices entreating, begging, overwhelmed his. He could only laugh and struggle to get away from the hands grasping legs, arms, coat, anything, everything, so that they might keep him fast and get his consent.

“Why, really,” he cried, when the tumult had a little subsided, “you are too unreasonable. Here have I spent the whole forenoon, toiling like a galley-slave to please you.”

“To please us! O papa, as if this were our room that you have been papering.”

“Have not I told you,” he said, with mock gravity, “that I do not care whether I am in a palace or a coal-hole? I have laboured at this papering business only that you might have the pleasure of watching me.”

“And we watched,” replied Agnes, with answering gravity, “only to give you the pleasure of our society. Such a lovely day! We might have had the most enchanting of walks if we had not been unwilling to leave you all alone.”

"And the only return they ask," said Mrs Gordon, "is that you will take a walk with them now. He will, I can see, children. So off you go to wash your faces and hands, and smooth your hair. Dinner is quite ready. See, papa is sighing and resigning himself to his fate. If you say another word you may spoil all."





CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST WALK.

HIS first dinner at the cottage passed very cheerfully. All except Willie were present. Mr and Mrs Gordon had agreed that at first, at least, until the servants got accustomed to the increase of work, it might be as well to have only one early dinner for all. And Blanche and Edward were, therefore, to their intense delight, admitted to dine with their elders.

The object and length of the proposed walk were discussed. Mrs Gordon doubted the propriety of her making one of the party. There was still a good deal to do, she said, and it did not seem right to leave Bell and Nelly to work on alone. But her husband and children pleaded so earnestly, that she yielded. Mr Gordon said that a little cessation from dust and turmoil was absolutely necessary for her; and she confessed that fresh air and green grass and trees would be very delightful after a long forenoon spent among boxes and packages.

“Only,” she said, “I should not like to shorten your

walk, and I don't feel able for a very long one. My knees ache a good deal with standing so much, and running up and down stairs so often."

Agnes looked up with sudden penitence.

"O mamma," she cried; "and I might have run up and down stairs for you. And I have been idle all forenoon, watching papa, of no use to any one."

"I should have summoned you, my dear, if I had wished for your help," Mrs Gordon said, kindly.

The truth was, that she was by no means as yet reconciled to the narrow, steep stairs. While busy, it had been a great comfort to her to know that the little ones were out under Mary's guardianship, and the elders safe in the back-room with their father.

"But, mamma," said Lionel, "we don't care about a regular long walk. We only want to get to those pretty sloping fields that we saw last night on the side of the Knock. We shall find a seat for you old people, and we can explore about, and make discoveries, and come and report to you."

"I go too, mamma," cried Blanche.

"And I explode too, mamma," cried Ned, clambering up on the table to enforce his request.

"Yes," said Colin, tapping him on the head, while the others were laughing at his mistake. "We'll make a little hole here and put in some gunpowder, and you shall explode and fly up like a rocket."

"But, mamma, mayn't they go?" pleaded Agnes. "Willie did not take his nap this forenoon. He was only falling asleep when we came to dinner. It would

be a shame to keep the little ones in the house until he awakes. Let them go with us."

Mrs Gordon was very ready to consent.

"Only," stipulated Mr Gordon, "some of you youngsters must take charge of them; mamma is too tired to be allowed to drag about or look after these little monkeys."

Agnes and Malcolm readily offered their services as nursery-maids. Malcolm was very fond of the "babies," and they were devotedly fond of him.

As dinner was now over, Agnes carried off Blanche and Ned at once to get them ready. Willie was asleep in his cot, Mary at dinner, and for the first time Blanche and Ned realised the change in their circumstances. There was no second nurse to dress them, and they must be dressed that very instant. Agnes, however, was very ready to take the second nurse's place. Although not particularly neat in her own dress, she took a great pleasure in making them look very nice. And as she carefully arranged their neck-ties, smoothed down their collars, straightened the bows of their hat-strings, and shook out the skirts of their overalls, she had a comfortable feeling that she was doing the work very well and cleverly, and that it was pleasant to be of use.

Blanche and Ned were ready in good time, but not Agnes; and as the shouts of the impatient boys ringing through the house threatened to awaken Willie, she begged them to set out and she could overtake them. Her hat and cape were soon tied on, and rosy, breathless, and smiling, she came up with the others just as

they reached the top of the hill. Blanche was between her elder brothers, being half carried, half swung up the brae. Ned, on his father's shoulder, was in ecstasies of laughter at Colin, who was sometimes a monkey, creeping up on hands and feet, sometimes a fierce tiger, springing on him to tear him from his throne. They were a merry group, and as they turned out of the principal street up towards the Knock, some of the town's-people who knew them by sight, and knew their history, looked after them and said, that indeed they did not seem to take their loss of fortune much to heart, that money did not seem to signify much to them.

No, not on that bright, breezy day, out on the open, sunny hill-side. They enjoyed their walk as much as ever they had done at Eagle's Crag. The boys, according to promise, sought out and found a seat for their mother under the shade and shelter of a bank of trees at the top of a grass field, in which the children could play as they liked. The field was exactly such an one as their fancy had pictured—sunny, cheerful, and steep. Soon a set of races were got up. Lionel and Malcolm, who could easily outstrip the others, were laden with a little one apiece riding on their shoulders, and the chances of success were thus made pretty equal. The race was always down hill for Cecil's benefit, who could not compete with his stronger brothers and Agnes going up so steep an ascent. And when the bottom had been gained, it was pleasant to saunter up again to their father and mother to report the result.

Cecil was at that time unusually strong, but he got

tired sooner than the others, and came to sit at his mother's feet. He had enjoyed his game very heartily, and gentle and contented by nature, it never came into his head to murmur that he could not go on so long as Colin could. He sat down and looked out upon the wide, sunny view with great delight.

"What a pleasant thing sunshine is, mamma," he said, after a few minutes of silent enjoyment. "It makes the hills and woods look so happy. Don't you think everything looks bright and happy this afternoon?"

"I think there is a good deal of sunshine come over us all to-day, Cecil," said Mrs Gordon.

"Indeed, I think there is," he replied, eagerly. "Mamma, don't you think we are wonderfully happy; everything seems wonderfully pleasant, considering that it was only yesterday that we left dear Eagle's Crag. How is it, papa, do you think?"

"There are a good many reasons why it should be so, Cecil. Suppose you try to find them out for yourself."

"The kind of day is one, I think," he said, slowly. "The sun is so sunny, somehow, and the wind makes the bright spots dance so quickly and merrily over the trees, and hills, and fields. And then, I think, you know things turning out more pleasantly than we expected, makes us feel happier than we might have done. We fancied that our new way of life would be so dull and stupid, it is a great relief to find that it is really pretty cheerful."

"A great relief, too, to have done with all the pain

you suffered during the last ten days, looking forward to yesterday's parting, which is now fairly over."

"Somehow I think, mamma, that after a trouble has been got over, one feels happier than before it came on."

"It is so, my dear. The spirit naturally rises again after it has been bowed down; and whatever is bright in the present lot, looks all the brighter from the contrast with the lately past darkness."

"I think, mamma," he pursued a little shyly, "that it is very kind of God to give us that bright, rested kind of feeling after we have come out of darkness and trouble."

"Indeed, indeed, He is full of loving-kindness and tender care for our happiness," she said, earnestly. "Oh," turning to her husband, "how wonderfully everything has been done for us! Who could have believed that things would have turned out so well, and even pleasant, for us?"

They were joined by Agnes. Cecil's defection had taken spirit away from the races. They were kept up for a turn or two, but grew more and more languid each time. They were now finally abandoned, and a new amusement begun. The boys were rolling down hill, throwing somersets, converting themselves into coach wheels, monkeys, and other uncouth animals, for the diversion of the children, who, sitting on the grass, shouted with laughter at every fresh essay. Cecil, revived by his few minutes of rest, was ready to join the tumblers. It was Agnes's turn to be thrown out of the

game. Gladly would she have joined in it, but her mamma said it was not a play fit for girls; and though unconvinced, Agnes yielded obedience, and came to take Cecil's place at Mrs Gordon's feet.

She did not, like Cecil, look round and rejoice in the view. With her eyes fixed on the ground, she sat idly and discontentedly, pulling up and throwing from her handfuls of grass.

"How I wish I were a boy," she cried at last, with great vehemence.

"Indeed, I wish nothing of the kind," Mrs Gordon said. "I have quite enough of boys already. I could not afford to give my only useful girl for one of them. Why, Agnes, what should I do without my good, serviceable little daughter?"

Agnes looked up brightly. It was pleasant to hear her mother say that she was of use, was serviceable.

"Still," she persisted, "it is horribly provoking, when I am in the middle of playing with the boys, to be stopped every now and then, and to be told that it is not becoming for girls to do this or to do that; and," with a deep sigh, "the worst of it is, that it will be always getting worse as I get older. When I have quite grown up into the decencies of life, I am sure I don't know what it will be."

"And pray, my dear Agnes, are you at present out of the decencies of life? Mamma, you should inquire into the matter."

"O papa, you know what I mean. Of course, when I am older, it will be thought still more indecorous for

me to run, and jump, and climb, and keep always with the boys."

"By that time we may hope that the wish to run, and leap, and climb, may not be quite so strong as it is now," Mrs Gordon said, smiling. "However, Agnes, I must say that I have great sympathy with you. I often wish that we could get you a companion."

"Not a girl companion, mamma," Agnes cried; "I can't bear the idea of having girl companions. I would a thousand times rather have no companion at all."

"My dear Agnes, you have never known what it was to have a girl companion; you cannot tell how you should like one."

"Oh yes, indeed I can; I have had quite enough of experience. Don't you remember Sophia Mildmay, who spent last summer with her aunt, Lady Scott? And Lady Scott wished us to be friends, and said we should make such good companions for each other. And, oh, it was *such* a nuisance."

Her papa and mamma laughed at her vehemence; and Mr Gordon asked how it was such a nuisance.

"Well, you know, papa, whenever the boys were setting off for a game of cricket, or a row on the lake, or a clamber up the hills, or any delightful thing, there was Sophia putting her arm round my neck, and saying, 'Come, Agnes, we'll leave these rude boys to themselves; you and I shall have such a nice quiet afternoon together.' Quiet enough, indeed."

"And what did you do on the quiet afternoons?" he asked again.

“ O papa, talked, at least Sophia did, and such nonsense—such tiresome nonsense ! Pitied me because we never left Eagle’s Crag, and I had never been at an evening party ; told me about her white muslin dress with the blue sash, and her black velvet with the crimson, and how one gentleman had said she looked beautiful in this, and another that she was charming in that ; as if I cared one bit about it. And the sun shining on the loch all the time, and the waves rippling up, and calling us to come out, with their pleasant, cheery voices, and we sitting in a fusty-musty arbour, talking about dresses, and sashes, and such trash. O papa, who could bear it ? ”

Mr Gordon was greatly amused by the mixture of contempt and indignation with which she related her grievances ; but he acknowledged that he had no wish that Agnes should have girl companions like Sophia Mildmay.

“ Of course not,” said Mrs Gordon. “ But all girls are not like her. Agnes might have a pleasant, sensible girl companion ; and I think it would be very good for her. I don’t think it is quite good for her to be so entirely among boys.”

“ Oh, it won’t do her the least harm,” Mr Gordon said, confidently.

“ I have known girls to whom it would do no harm,” she persisted ; “ but Agnes is not one of them.”

“ Why, mamma ? What am I, that it should do more harm to me than to others ? ”

“ My dear Agnes,” her mother answered, tenderly, as

if fearing to pain her, "you are by nature rather more bold and independent than is altogether seemly for a woman. There is naturally a want of softness, of gentleness, in your manner, if not in your temper. With your peculiar temper, I fear that it is very bad for you to be altogether with boys."

"My dear wife," Mr Gordon began, but he checked himself, and said no more.

"Well," she asked, smiling, "why do you stop? What did you mean to say?"

"What ought not to be said lightly," he answered. "It was this: We know that the Lord, who made Agnes exactly what she is, is He who placed her the only girl among so many boys."

"True, true," she cried, with ready feeling. "I should have thought of that before. He loves her infinitely better than we can. We may safely leave Him to order her position in every respect as He sees best."

"That is Faith's comfort," Mr Gordon said. "And Reason, too, has comfort to offer, if we will listen to her."

"I am very ready to listen if you will put her voice into words for me," Mrs Gordon said, smiling.

"I think it is a great mistake to suppose that being much with boys has a tendency to make girls rough and hard," he said. "On the contrary, it is so natural for the sister to be the soother, comforter, peacemaker among the brothers, that she learns more quickly and fully to be gentle, considerate, and forbearing, than a brotherless girl can learn. And as the sister's duties to four brothers devolve altogether upon this our one big

girl, she has a fourfold opportunity of learning to exercise all those womanly virtues and graces."

Agnes looked up with a conscious look ; looked down again with a blush ; she did not feel at all sure that she was ready to take advantage of such opportunities, that she was careful to fulfil the sisterly offices.

"But where are those same four brothers?" Mrs Gordon asked, looking round.

The tumbling had ceased some time before. The young people were out of sight. Mrs Gordon rose to seek them. She had perfect confidence in their kindness towards the little ones, but she was by no means so sure of their prudence. They were not far off, only a little farther up the hill, where some trees had been lately cut, or blown down, and lay on the ground. The four boys had got up a large branch of one of these trees, and were carrying it between them with a gravity and unity of purpose that spoke of a settled object. What that was was presently seen. A large gray boulder stood up from amidst the grass near them. Across this they fixed their branch to form a see-saw. It was done just as Mrs Gordon came up.

"There now," cried Lionel, catching up Blanche, "you shall have a famous ride, my queen. Malcolm, put Ned on the other end."

"Do nothing of the kind," cried Mrs Gordon, hastening forward. "I never heard of such a mad-like scheme. The children have not sense to keep themselves properly balanced. At the first start, jerk, or fit of laughter, one might slip off, and where would the other be?"

"Oh, well," said Lionel, "you and I can get on, Malcolm, and take them on our knees."

"No indeed," said Mrs Gordon, quickly. "How can you be so rash, Lionel? See, the branch is round, the rock uneven. It will never go smoothly. If the branch turns round, how could you or Malcolm help yourselves with a child in your arms. It must not be."

"Nonsense, mamma," he cried, impatiently. "We can hold on with one hand, and keep the children up with the other."

"Lionel," came his father's voice, loud and authoritative, "your mother forbids it."

"But, papa, there is not the least particle of danger. It is absurd nonsense to think that there is," he persisted, growing angry.

"Your mother does not wish it, sir; that is enough for you," Mr Gordon said, sternly. He was much displeased by Lionel's disrespectful manner.

Lionel said no more, but stalked off in high indignation. His mother looked wistfully after him. He had carried a large portion of her sunshine with him, and brought a cloud, more or less dense, over the spirits of the whole party. The perfect harmony and pleasantness which had reigned were broken in upon. No one felt quite so comfortable and happy as they had done before.

The two little ones, disappointed of their promised pleasure, grew fretful and irritable. Malcolm, to amuse them, began to jump them by turns from the rock to the ground; but it was a relief to him as well as to Mrs

Gordon when they saw Mary coming down the road from the town.

"Mary has not understood our directions," he said. "There she is on the high-road, instead of coming up by the inn as we did."

"Well, it does not signify," Mrs Gordon replied. "But I think you boys might take Blanche and Ned down to her, and save her the trouble of dragging Willie up that steep road."

Blanche and Ned began to remonstrate against leaving the older party. But Malcolm and Colin, taking them between them, dashed down the hill, and delivered them safely up to Mary before they had time to make sure whether they were most frightened or amused by their rapid style of progress.

When the boys came back, Mrs Gordon proposed that, as they were tired of play, and she felt quite rested, they should pursue their walk a little farther, and get into the drive through the wood round the hill, of whose beauty they had heard so much.

"Some one call Lionel, and tell him we are going," she said.

"I will, mamma," said Agnes, rising and turning in the direction Lionel had taken.

She had been all this time pondering over her father's words about a sister's duties, and applying them to Lionel's present condition. Mr Gordon had seemed to think that every sister must naturally be the soother, comforter, and peacemaker to her brothers. Of course, then, he must think that she should now seek Lionel,

and try to bring him back to a more happy and comfortable temper. It would not be pleasant to do. Most probably he would be very cross and disagreeable. Her present seat was very comfortable, and she liked much to have a quiet chat with her father. But she had resolved to do all she could to bring sunshine into her home circle; and her father had said, that to do so she must be ready and watchful to remove trouble and difficulty out of every one's way, whenever she could. She looked up in her mother's face, and in its worn, saddened expression, read plainly, that her boy's sullenness was a sore trouble in her path. This decided her at once. She was ready to do what she could, let it be as disagreeable as it might.

She soon found Lionel. He had gone along the top of the field under the bank of wood, and stood leaning against a paling, keeping his face carefully turned away from the direction in which he supposed the others might come. Agnes had too much knowledge of his character to begin operations by any direct reference to what had passed. She went up to him with only a pleasant, "Oh, you are here, Lionel," and, standing by his side, looked where he was looking, in the hopes that a pretty view might afford a safe and natural subject of conversation.

But Lionel's station commanded no view but into a newly-sown turnip field. The smoothly-dressed furrows yielded no opportunity for remark. Agnes must look elsewhere. She turned to the wood; a pretty tuft of primroses caught her eye.

"Ah," she cried, cheerfully. "I was sure there must

be primroses here. And I daresay we shall find wood anemones, and wood sorrel, and wild hyacinths, too. We shall be able to make up beautiful posies of wild flowers."

No answer. Agnes looked a little farther, and espied some cranberry bushes, and enlarged eloquently upon the pleasures of cranberry and blaeberry gathering. Still no answer. The sullenness was too deep to yield even to the prospect of cranberry-gathering expeditions. Agnes felt disheartened and a little provoked. The walkers were now coming towards them in the wood-walk above. She could hear their voices, could catch a word or two of what they were saying. It sounded interesting. She wished to hear more. Why should she not leave Lionel to his sullenness, and go away to be comfortable with the rest? Why, but because this was a little piece of work for others which God had put into her hand, a small service to her mother and Lionel which He had allowed her the opportunity of rendering. She could not leave it. And now a bright thought struck her.

"O Lionel," she cried, "did you hear that Mrs Morgan has got one of the cottages at the end of our lane? Mamma settled about it for her this forenoon. Are not you glad?"

"I suppose so," he muttered, in a tone sufficiently indifferent.

"I am very glad for my own sake, but still more for mamma's," Agnes pursued. "Poor mamma will have such hard work with all of us to look after, and so many

things to do for herself that she has always been accustomed to get done for her. I am so glad that she will have Mrs Morgan to help her."

Now the hard lines that sullenness had drawn over his handsome face began to relax. He was devotedly attached to his mother. His heart was easily touched by the thought of the trouble and annoyance their change of fortune must bring upon her. For her sake, to provide her with comforts and luxuries, he would gladly have gone out to labour in the fields from morning to night, and have counted the hardest work a pleasure and a privilege. But comfort and luxury she did not wish for. Only a smiling face, a pleasant word from her sullen boy; and these he found it difficult to give. Some such reflection passed through his mind, a recollection of his resolution to shed what sunshine he could into his mother's daily path, a consciousness that he was now very far from keeping that resolution. Agnes saw the softening of expression; but before she had time to take advantage of it, a new force came upon the field to overcome his ill-temper.

The others had now got directly above where Lionel and Agnes stood. An opening in the wood enabled the two parties to see each other plainly. Mrs Gordon, looking anxiously round for the two absentees, saw them at once, and stopping, she with a kind smile beckoned to them to come and join the others.

"Come! Mamma is beckoning to us," cried Agnes, passing her hand through his reluctant arm.

"Bother! leave me alone," was his unpromising reply.

"O Lionel! will you not come to please mamma, when she came out on this walk, tired, and busy as she was, only because we wished it," Agnes pleaded, and pleaded effectually. Lionel made no voluntary move forward; but he did not resist Agnes's gentle pull, and together they climbed the steep bank.

Mr and Mrs Gordon had walked on. But the mother heard instantly the steps of her children, and looking round she again smiled upon Lionel, and held out her hand to invite him to her side. He could not altogether resist her kindness, and although he still would not meet her eye, would not answer her smile, he went forward, so that she might rest her hand upon his shoulder.

"We are speaking of what is interesting to you, Lionel," she said.

Lionel could not yet give the pleasant-toned answer she had a right to expect. Malcolm was ready to fill up the blank. He and Lionel were very warm friends, inseparable companions. Malcolm was ever ready to bear with Lionel's imperiousness, ever eager to do what he could for him. He could not have acted Agnes's part. He would have been too blunt, and have made Lionel angry. But now that Agnes had succeeded so far, Malcolm was watchful to make smooth and easy the painful descent from sullenness and pride, to the usual footing of easy, pleasant intercourse, anxious that Lionel should as soon as possible forget that there had been any difference between him and the others. He took the talking off his hands.

"It may be interesting to us, mamma," he said; "but

it is not altogether pleasant. Lionel, mamma says we must begin lessons again on Monday."

"If not pleasant to you, it is still less so to me," said Mr Gordon. "I must make the most of the two days left to me. After Monday, no more unbroken forenoons. I must give, I suppose, an hour and a half to you old fellows, and at least an hour to the twins."

"I am not sure about that," said Mrs Gordon. "I have been laying plans to save your time. You have agreed to leave English, writing, and arithmetic to me."

"Why, yes; I shall allow you to try how you can get on. They will join in Agnes's lessons, and so not give you additional work; and if you can't keep them in order, you have only to apply to me—I am always at hand. But the Latin, Greek, and mathematics remain for my share."

"Well, but hear my plan. You say that Lionel and Malcolm are well advanced, for their age, in all these matters; it will do them no harm, for a month or two, to go over again, and make sure of the ground they have gained. I propose that they should do so by teaching me; and when they have brought me ahead of the twins, I shall take them off your hands, and give you the elders. So you shall have only one set at a time."

"But, mamma," said Lionel, "why might not Malcolm and I take the twins at once, and so save you trouble?"

It was said a little gruffly; but Mrs Gordon did not observe the gruffness; she only felt the consideration

for her comfort, and thanked him heartily for it. Her thanks swept off a large corner of the cloud, half shame, half sullenness, which still lay upon his spirits. There was more ease and graciousness in his persisting.

“But, mamma, might not it do? Why do you shake your head? Agnes teaches Blanche; why should not I teach Colin and Cecil?”

“There is a great difference between the two cases, my dear boy. Blanche’s lessons are very short, Agnes is very patient, and Blanche is pretty good.”

“While Colin,” Mr Gordon concluded, “is the idlest dog in the world, Cecil is a little slow and indolent, and you, Lionel, are imperious, and by no means too willing to make excuse or allowance. You would have no patience with Colin’s inattention. Colin would never stand your high tone of command, or contemptuous reproof; there would be quarrels and rows without end, far more trying to mamma than the labour of learning and teaching Latin and Greek.”

“But there is Malcolm, papa, he would do; there is no putting him out of temper,” said Colin.

Malcolm’s angry push, and “Hold your tongue, you little goose,” rather belied this assertion. In the present delicate, wavering state of Lionel’s temper, Malcolm was afraid that the emphasis on the word “him” might bring about a relapse of the malady under which he had been suffering.

“Certainly Malcolm does take matters very easily,” said Mr Gordon, “only too easily; there is the pity with him. He would suffer you to stumble through

your lessons anyhow : prompt you here, show you the book there, be grammar and dictionary as well as master, and get through the business without your being a bit wiser than when you began."

"Still, papa, that would be better—anything would be better than mamma having all the trouble," Lionel said, bluntly.

"Oh, mamma's plan is simply absurd ; not worth a second's thought," he replied, coolly.

"You are very complimentary," she said, laughing. "Pray, wherein lies the absurdity of my plan ?"

"In the first place, you have, as Lionel says, enough to do already, without burdening yourself with these matters. In the second, Colin would wear you out, both body and spirit, in a week, by his carelessness and inattention. Now, with me, when he gets very bad, I can look fierce, and bring him to his senses in a moment. You never could. And, after all, don't fancy I grudge the time ; I was only making a moan, as nurse used to say. These two old fellows are really good pupils, so diligent as to give little trouble. I can trust them to write exercises, and work out problems, by themselves, which I can take my own time to correct."

"We are not to go to school, then ?" Malcolm asked.

"Well, I don't know," Mr Gordon answered, doubtfully. "I have always thought and said that it was good for boys to go to school ; but, as we are now situated, I don't see that it could be managed without sending you away from us altogether. And I should not like you two old ones, more especially, to be taken

from under your mother's tender, softening influence for a year or two yet."

"Indeed, papa," said Agnes, a little warmly, "I should think that our Lionel and Malcolm might be left alone, and trusted to keep right more than most boys."

"Perhaps so," he answered, seriously; "but with Lionel's strong, hastily-formed judgments, and want of patience with the faults of others, I fear he might grow hard and cold, if he had not his mother beside him, to keep his heart warm and tender. And Malcolm, taking everything so easily, passing over troubles so lightly, I dread his learning to take sin easily, to think lightly of it, without his mother's earnestness and right, deep feeling to show him the evil."

There was a pause; the children were impressed by the seriousness of their father's tones, and touched by the openness with which he expressed his anxiety for their good. He was the first to speak.

"Then," he said, more gaily, "if ever a family can be favourably situated for trying the experience of home education, I think we are. I have no professional duties to take up my time or carry me from home. I can always give as much attention to you as is necessary. I was a hard student in my youth. I think I should at least be able to carry on you two, steady and intelligent as you are, until you are ready for college; and if I find in the end that I cannot drag on this idle monkey, (laying his hand upon Colin's shoulder,) why, perhaps by

that time we may have made a fortune, and be able to go to Edinburgh in a body."

"Papa, I am not so very bad," Colin began, reddening and indignant.

"Never mind what you are," interrupted Malcolm; "we are to remain here altogether for a year or two at any rate, that is enough for the present. See, Lionel, what a famous place for a game of leap-frog; come, let us start."

It was a good move. The violent exercise and excitement carried off the very last remains of ill-humour or awkwardness; and by the time the youngsters overtook Mr and Mrs Gordon near their own door, Lionel's face was as bright as any of the others. As they went into the house, he held back his father for a minute, to say, with downcast eyes and a heightened colour—

"Papa, you were angry at the way in which I spoke. It was very wrong, I am very sorry."

"I was much displeased, my boy," Mr Gordon said, gravely, "displeased, grieved, disappointed. You are not yet able to understand all the claims your mother has to your deep respect and reverence; but I had hoped that her extreme tenderness, her unselfish affection and devotion, might have saved her from such rudeness from her own son."

Something very like a tear glistened in Lionel's eye as he said again, still more penitently—

"I am *very* sorry."

"Then no more need be said," Mr Gordon an-

swered, shaking his hand ; and they went in in great amity.

Lionel felt too deeply to be able to make the same confession to his mother ; but it was not needed. His watchful attention to her through the whole evening, his constant readiness to see her wants, and to give her help, were the best and most pleasing assurance that he was truly penitent.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUNSHINE IS BRIGHT TO THOSE WHO LOOK OUT FOR IT.

N Monday, as Mrs Gordon had decided, lessons were begun, and regular hours appointed for the family's various occupations. Perhaps you might like to know how the day was divided.

Before the early breakfast hour, the children were allowed to do as they pleased; but from breakfast to dinner was strictly devoted to lessons. While Mary was setting her nursery in order, Mrs Gordon had the charge of the three little ones. Agnes gave Blanche a short reading lesson at that hour, and the boys had an opportunity for looking over and making sure of what they had prepared the day before. Mrs Gordon was generally free by about nine o'clock, and then the business of the day began. As had been agreed, Mr Gordon took charge only of the regular boy lessons, and left to Mrs Gordon the writing, arithmetic, and English. In addition, she gave the two older boys instruction in French along with Agnes. The repetition of lessons was generally over soon after twelve, so that between an

hour and a-half and two hours were left for the preparation for next day. To the attentive and diligent this was quite sufficient ; but the idle had sometimes to give up a little more time before tea to the business.

After dinner, the nursery party were again consigned to their mamma while Mary got her dinner. This was the merriest hour of the twenty-four. Mr Gordon always spent it with the children, that he might enjoy his "babies," as he called them. In fine weather the whole family had generally a boisterous game of romps in the garden, or orchard, and Mary's appearance to claim her charge was often as unwelcome to the elders as to the little bodies.

Mr Gordon spent the rest of the afternoon in his study. Mrs Gordon sometimes took her work or book into the orchard, to act as umpire and applauder in the various leaping and running matches, games at quoits, with hoops or balls, with which the boys and Agnes amused themselves, or she went with them up the Knock to act a somewhat similar part. On other days, the children set out on fishing or exploring expeditions by themselves, coming home to tea now and then with baskets full of fish, but more frequently only with heads full of the adventures they had met with, or the wonders and beauties they had discovered.

After tea, when the weather was favourable, Mrs Gordon invariably accompanied the five old ones in a pretty long walk, and Mr Gordon either went with them, or came to meet them on their return.

And, on the whole, the children were really happy

and contented. At first the excitement of novelty kept them amused, and prevented any excessive regret for what they had lost ; and by the time that novelty had worn off, they had grown accustomed to their new position, and the first bitterness of parting from Eagle's Crag was in a measure forgotten. They enjoyed more of their mother's society than they had done at Eagle's Crag, where she had had a large establishment of servants to look after, and a numerous set of dependants and poor friends to visit and care for ; and altogether life seemed almost as bright and pleasant as it had ever done.

“Really we get on wonderfully well here. We contrive to keep ourselves wonderfully comfortable and happy,” said Malcolm one afternoon, as he threw himself upon the grass at his mother’s side to rest, after a most enjoyable game of the “wild man of the woods,” enacted among the trees at the top of the Knock.

“Only,” sighed Colin, a little discontentedly, “we have far fewer games to play at, fewer things to do here, than we had at Eagle’s Crag.”

“Well, where is the use of grumbling about that?” Lionel answered, contemptuously ; “a fellow can’t do more than one thing, can’t play at more than one game at a time. While we have one, it is as much as we want, for the present at least.”

“But always playing at the same things, one must get tired of them some time,” Colin persisted.

“Wait till the some time comes then,” said Malcolm, laughing ; “time enough to grumble then.”

“Right, Malcolm,” said Mrs Gordon. “One can always find time to grumble in the end. There is never any use in grumbling beforehand.”

“Is there ever any use in grumbling at all, mamma?” Agnes asked, saucily.

“I should think not; neither use, sense, nor pleasure,” Lionel pronounced. “And, at any rate, we need not begin to sigh and wish for other games until we have got the last drop of pleasure and enjoyment out of those we have.”

“And when will that be, Lionel?” Mrs Gordon asked, smiling. “Don’t you know there is a good little fairy who goes through the world laying up fresh stores of enjoyment for those who are heartily ready to enjoy?”

“And how does she lay them up?” Malcolm asked.

“Some people say that she puts fresh sources of enjoyment into the things themselves. Others, that she only clears the eyes of the enjoyers, so that they can see and admire what lies hidden from ordinary people. I sometimes fancy that she does both.”

“How would she manage with this blue-bell, mamma?” Agnes asked, plucking one and giving it to Mrs Gordon.

“The common, careless admirer sees that it is a pretty flower, of a delicate colour and elegant shape. But for him who studies it with a wish to see and enjoy thoroughly its every beauty, the fairy, of whom I speak, traces out all these delicate veins, and that faint shading up from the bottom of the cup; she causes him to mark the exquisite fineness of the texture of its pale blue robe,

the contrast between the slender stem and the rounded bell of the flower ; and, fluttering past on her fairy wings, for him she makes each bell to nod and bend upon its elastic stalk, and to delight his heart with its light and graceful motion."

"And the primrose, mamma?" Agnes cried, much pleased with the fancy.

"For the hearty admirer and lover, the fairy of enjoyment crisps the cheerful green leaves of the primrose, and gives that beautiful transparency to their veins. For him she makes the bright little flower lift up its head and laugh out of the very gladness of its heart, and she arranges with exquisite grace the folds of the still unopened buds. In the wood anemone how delicately she blends the pure white with the pink that shades off each thread-like streak of pale yellow, brown, and green, and how brightly she makes the warm, brown stalk to arise from among its lovely green leaves. I need not tell you how charmingly she makes the small, dancing birch-leaves in the wood, to contrast with the grave, business-like foliage of the elm ; nor how exquisitely she varies the tints of the early and late beeches, until the eye and heart are weary with marking and admiring."

"I think she has to do with the ears as well as with the eyes, mamma," Malcolm observed. "How many pleasant sounds there are in the air which we never hear unless we listen for them!"

"And how much more joy-giving is the song of the lark or of the thrush on some days than on others!" added Agnes.

“True,” said Mrs Gordon; “and it is for the attentive listener that the good fairy brings out the triumph in the carol of the blackbird, the tenderness in the sweet plaint of the wood-pigeon.”

“The cheerfulness in the sound of the wind among the leaves,” said Lionel; “the peacefulness, the rest-giving there is in the murmur of the waters that comes to us, we hardly know from where.”

“And the hum of the insects, mamma,” cried Cecil, “and the chirp and click of the grasshopper.”

“But oh, look, look there!” cried Agnes, suddenly interrupting the enumeration, and pointing towards the Eagle’s Crag hills.

Every eye looked, and every heart was thrilled with intense pleasure and admiration by what they saw.

The day was bright, but cold. The wind was from the north, not high, but steady and continuous. There were few clouds, but what there were lay in long straight lines, so that when once the sun got entangled among them, it could not soon free itself again. It had been thus imprisoned ever since our party left home. The sky to the south-east and east was cloudless, and the landscape under it clear and distinct, but with that still, lifeless, waiting look, which is peculiar to such a day. Hill and dale, woods and fields, seemed to be expecting each moment that the sunlight would break forth again, to wake them up into animation and brilliancy.

As Agnes spoke, break forth it did, but not for them. Full it poured down upon one peak of the Eagle’s Crag range, lighting up every height, darkening every hollow,







Mrs. Gordon and the children on the Hill.



making the whole so near, and bringing out every detail with so much distinctness, that the Gordons could recognise many a well-known object; and such names as "Willow crag," "White crag," "Old man's head," and "Rowan-tree den," were called over with breathless eagerness. Further and further down it spread.

"And now I am sure it is shining down upon our own ash-tree crag," cried Agnes in a saddened tone. "Oh fancy how it will be flashing through the leaves, and laughing upon the soft green grass below."

There was no time, however, to indulge in regrets. Onward and onward it came in calm majesty, leaving a path of glory and beauty behind it; and now passing over the wooded face of one of the near hills, it glided down into the heart of a lovely green field which lay embayed, as it were, between two promontories of wood and rock, and lighted it up to its farthest corner.

Beautiful, very beautiful, was the sight. Agnes looked up in her mother's face to read her pleasure in her eyes. Those eyes were shining through tears. Agnes fancied that the tears arose from thoughts of the dear old home lying in that bright sunlight. She had too much tact, or rather delicacy of feeling, to take any direct notice of an emotion her mother might wish to conceal; but she stole her hand gently into Mrs Gordon's as it lay upon her lap, as if seeking instinctively to give what sympathy she could. Mrs Gordon at once understood and answered her child's thought.

"Those are not tears of sadness, my little Agnes," she said, smiling through them. "They came I hardly

know how ; from intense pleasure, I believe, in so much loveliness ; from gratitude, I hope, to the good Lord who pours so much beauty into our world. O sunlight, sunlight, how heart-cheering thou art ! ”

Again there were a few moments of silent enjoyment, while the light faded back again with the same grave grace with which it had come forth. Lionel was the first to speak.

“ Mamma,” he said, abruptly, “ I should like to be a painter. Could you and papa be willing that I should ? ”

“ We could be willing that you should be that for which the talents God has given most fit you, my boy,” she said, earnestly. “ What profession you choose is of less consequence than that you should be a whole man in it, earnest, true-hearted, and strong.”

“ But, mamma,” Agnes cried, eagerly, “ surely you could not be willing that our Lionel should be only a painter, and he so clever, so studious.”

“ *Only* a painter ! ” Lionel repeated, hotly ; “ Agnes, you don’t know what you are saying.”

“ But, Lionel, any one can be a painter,” she began.

He interrupted, in great indignation—

“ Any one can be a painter ! I never heard such nonsense. Much you know about the matter, if you think so. Mamma, is not she foolish ? ”

“ Oh, of course I know it requires a certain knack, an art, a genius, if you like that better,” she added, hastily, as she caught his fiery glance ; “ but only a genius for one thing, of one kind. Now, papa says that

you have such great talents, that you are such a deep thinker for your age. I can't help thinking that all that would be thrown away upon a painter. A painter has little use for deep thoughts."

"Indeed, that is a new doctrine," he answered, loftily ; "and pray how is the painter to inspire deep thoughts, or high and noble thoughts in others, unless he has them in himself? And what is a painter worth if he cannot do that?"

"Still," she persisted, "you like so much to learn, to know about so many things. Science is of no use to a painter, and papa always says that you are a boy after his own heart, because you have such a natural love of science. What has a painter to do with science?"

"A great deal with every science," he said, warmly ; "he ought to know about everything."

"About chemistry, I suppose," she admitted, "that he may know how to make up his colours."

"And about light," suggested Malcolm, "which papa says is such a difficult scientific question, else how could he make his lights and shades properly, and about winds and weather too. If he were to bring such a straight, calm light, as we saw just now, out of a sky covered with small rounded clouds, or with the trees bending away before a strong west wind, every one would feel that his picture was unnatural. No one ever saw just such a path of light in a breezy day, or in a west or south wind."

Agnes began to feel she might be mistaken. Mrs Gordon took Lionel's side.

"Even sciences which seem farthest removed from a painter's sphere must be well known, if he would be perfect," she said. "Take geology, for instance, or a knowledge of the different strata of the earth ; each formation gives a distinctive character to the outline of the hills, affects in a distinctive manner the fertility of the soil. Were he to clothe a landscape, whose ragged peaks speak of granite, with the vegetation peculiar to the more softly swelling clay or chalk formation, what would the man of science think of his picture ? and would not even the unlettered, but observant, feel that there was something incongruous and unnatural in such a combination ?"

"And then," Lionel cried, enthusiastically, "how earnestly he must study man, to be able to elevate, to improve, to cheer, and comfort as he wishes."

"I can understand how a picture of some great action can elevate a man's mind and strengthen him," said Malcolm ; "but a mere landscape, what could it do ? I don't see how it could either cheer, or strengthen, or improve me."

"Ah, you say so without reflecting," Mrs Gordon said, quickly. "Fancy yourself, Malcolm, tied down to an arduous, uninteresting occupation, labouring day after day in a close, dusty room, until both heart and head are aching, dull, and weary ; and some one sets before you a faithful likeness of just such a scene of brightness, freshness, and glory, as has been gladdening our hearts. Would it not bring instant refreshment, instant strengthening ? Would not your heart bound

within you to think that the Lord had created such glorious beauty, even though your poor eyes might never feed upon it? Would not you drink in every tint, every bright light, every cool shade, every graceful outline, until body and mind grew calm, and rested, and refreshed? Oh, what a deep resting joy God has put into the beauty which comes fresh from His hand?" And again the moisture of deep, earnest feeling dimmed her eyes.

"What a fool I am this afternoon!" she cried, half laughing, as she dashed it away.

"You do not really think so. You should not say it," said a voice behind them. She started and looked round. It was her husband.

"No, I do not think it. I ought not to have said it, particularly not before those boys," she said, instantly, smiling, and making room for him to sit beside her.

"Why do you say that she should not, papa?" Agnes asked.

"Because that softness and tenderness of feeling which brought the water to her eyes are a blessing, not a folly," he answered; "it is not good that you young ones should learn to despise such things."

"And why particularly bad for the boys?" Lionel asked.

"Because boys are more apt than girls to make such a mistake," Mr Gordon said.

"Well, but it signifies less to boys than to girls. Boys have less to do with softness and tenderness than girls have."

"Exactly so," Mr Gordon observed, dryly; "you are fully justifying your mamma's 'particularly the boys.'"

"But you know, papa," he persisted, reddening, and piqued by his father's manner, "that unless a man be manly, he is worth little."

"True enough; but, like most boys, you make the grand mistake of supposing that softness and tenderness of feeling are incompatible with manliness of character. It is so rarely that a boy knows what real manliness is."

"Indeed, I think I know," Lionel said.

"Well, define then. Let us hear your notions on the matter."

"A manly fellow must be bold," he began, slowly, and as if anxious to make no mistake, "fearless, determined."

"Determined in what?" asked Mrs Gordon. "Determined to have his own way, to seek his own pleasure? There is little manliness in that."

"No, mamma, but determined to do the thing that is right, not caring for the trouble he may meet in doing it."

"Very good," Mrs Gordon said, approvingly, "quite right. Is he not?" to her husband.

"Right as far as he has gone. But is that all, Lionel?"

"I think, too, that he must be unselfish."

"Certainly unselfish," Mrs Gordon said. "Indeed, it seems to me that unselfishness is the basis of most of the *manly* qualities."

“Of boldness, of fearlessness, mamma?” Malcolm asked, doubtfully.

“Well, I don’t know. I suppose there is a natural fearlessness, a kind of animal courage, which forms a lower feature of the manly character. But of this I am sure, that whether a man be by nature bold or fearful in proportion as he increases in unselfishness, so will he find it increasingly easy to go forward to meet danger, pain, or difficulty in the path of duty.”

“Of course,” Malcolm assented; “the man who thinks little of, or cares little for his own troubles, pains, and difficulties, is little apt to be much afraid of meeting them.”

“And the unselfish man is likely to be the most determined to do the thing that is right,” observed Mr Gordon, “least apt to weigh his own pain or ease, his own sorrow or happiness, against the call of duty or the power of rendering a service to others.”

“When I hear of a manly boy or man,” Agnes said, “I always fancy that he must be very merry and joyous.”

“That point must not be too broadly laid down,” Mr Gordon replied; “one of the most manly fellows I ever knew, was one upon whom family affliction pressed so sorely, that for him to be merry and joyous would have been to be unfeeling. At the same time, there is no doubt that the man whose heart is free from little selfish cares and troubles is more ready than others to enjoy what is enjoyable. He is generally a genial, hearty man, with an eye quick to see, and a heart quick to feel, every brightness or good that comes near him.”

"And as he thinks little about his own cares and troubles, so they wound him little, pass lightly over him, are soon forgotten," Mrs Gordon added.

"To be sure," said Lionel, vehemently, "nothing can well be more unmanly than to sit down and growl, and groan, and sigh, and cry over every little trouble that happens to one. And that the unselfish man is little inclined to do."

"Mamma," said Agnes, "you say that kindly thought and consideration for others make the sunshine of home. I think that selfishness has a good deal to do with its clouds."

"A great deal indeed," she answered, with feeling. "Selfishness darkens more homes, embitters more lives, than we can easily believe. It often seems to me like the fabled Upas-tree, shedding poison and death upon all that comes within its reach."

"And it was not always so," Mr Gordon said, gravely, even sadly, "God never meant it to be so. At first upon man's heart was engraven that law which is now too often only upon our lips—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.' It is terribly different now. However," he added, more cheerfully, after a moment's pause, "better than to mourn and sigh over the evil, is it to put forth our hands, in the Lord's strength, to do what we may to lessen it."

"We can do something for the selfishness in ourselves, papa; but what can we do for the selfishness of *others*?" Cecil asked, thoughtfully.

“Oh, children like us can do little indeed,” Agnes interposed.

“Remember, my child, how in the work of the Tabernacle, each man and woman did that work for which the Lord had made him or her ‘wise-hearted’ to do it, and had given the skill needful. Had each one sat down and said, I can do so little, it is not worth while to give in my little share, the work would never have been done, never even begun.”

“And when in Nehemiah’s time they repaired the wall of Jerusalem, you remember how each man worked at the piece that was before his house, and so all was repaired,” Mrs Gordon added.

“Well, but what is the piece before us children?” Lionel asked. “I don’t see it.”

“Not to run through the world on a crusade against selfishness, crying to all you meet, ‘You are selfish; give up your selfishness,’” Mr Gordon said.

The children laughed.

“But by keeping the sunshine of kindness ever bright in your own spirit,” he went on. “There is nothing like sunshine for dispersing clouds.”

“There was that little overloaded girl whom we met just now, as we came down the hill,” Mrs Gordon said. “Did you observe the cloud of gloom and sullenness which was in her face when we first met her? Surely her mind was busy with nothing but her own troubles, with the hardship of having to carry so heavy a load, and of having no one to help her; but when Colin and Malcolm so kindly turned back with her, and offered to

carry her bundle of sticks quite up to the town, how her face brightened. One could see that gratitude and admiration of their kindness had at once dispersed the gloomy brooding over her troubles; and as she followed them I don't think her body felt more rested by its freedom from the heavy burden, than her heart felt refreshed and brightened by the kindness which had seen and been concerned for her pain and trouble."

"And the good did not stop there," Mr Gordon asserted, as if he had really seen the facts he described. "Just as the little girl had deposited her load of sticks at her own door, she saw a feeble, weary old woman go slowly past the house to get her pitcher filled at the well. The pleasure of being helped made her wish to help another, and she ran out, and said kindly and pleasantly, 'Give me your pitcher, granny, and I'll fill it and carry it home for you.'"

"Did she, papa?" Agnes asked, eagerly. "Ah," as she caught her father's smile, "you know nothing about it. It has all come out of your own head."

"Well, but never mind, it is very interesting. Please go on, papa. What happened next?" said Colin, who dearly loved a story.

"Granny had been feeling very lonely and desolate, brooding over her poverty and feebleness, and thinking that no one ever thought of or cared for her; but now the sunshine of your kindness had spread. A pleasant cheery glint went down into the farthest corner of her heart, bringing brightness and comfort where all had *been so dark and dreary*. Then, as she stood resting

against the wall, and thinking how pleasant it was that there were kind, thoughtful little girls in the world, a wee toddling bairnie came past, missed its footing, and fell on its face in the gutter, its precious piece of biscuit which it had been so tenderly cherishing, rolling away, and being snapped up by a greedy dog. Kindly, tenderly the old woman raised him up, wiped the mud from his face and hands, and rummaged out of her pocket an old ball which she had found in the streets a day or two ago, and which comforted the little fellow for the loss of his biscuit."

"Well, and what next?" cried one or two eager voices, as Mr Gordon paused.

"I suppose the next person was the boy's mother, who ran out when she heard him cry. Poor woman! Things had been going ill with her all day. She had been pressed down and overborne with a hundred and fifty small cares and troubles. She had been feeling as if all the world were against her, as if every one were conspiring to work her ill, and had been indulging in selfish, repining thoughts. The old granny's kindness to her boy was the very first gleam of anything pleasant, which had come in her way since the sun rose upon her this morning. There were not many words spoken by either woman, for, indeed, the service was too trifling to call for speeches on either side. But as the mother stooped to lift up her boy, they looked and smiled on each other, and kindness beamed from one heart straight into the other. The younger woman went back into her house feeling fifty times more happy and amiable

than when she left it ; and when her husband comes home by and by, she will greet him with smiles and kindly looks, instead of with the gloom and depression which would have met him an hour or two ago."

" And he will be made to feel happy and kindly too," added Colin. " And when he goes out for his smoke after supper, he will meet some friend who is cast down and gloomy, and he will cheer him. And"—

" And so on, and so on, the sunshine will spread over the whole town, and, perhaps, come round again to you and Malcolm to reward you, for being the first to make it break forth. But we have not time to follow it further," said Mr Gordon, rising as he spoke.

" Yes, time ; that is what I want to know about," said Agnes. " How did you get time to come out here ? You said you were going to be dreadfully busy."

" And so I was as busy as man could be, when suddenly a train of brilliant ideas took wings and flew off out of my reach ; and as I found I could not get hold of them again, sitting at my desk, I came up to the Knock, hoping to find that they had alighted somewhere hereabouts."

" And did you find them ?" she asked, laughing.

" No ; I was in full chase, the prey in sight, and nearly within my grasp, when a loud exclamation of ' Oh, look there ! ' distracted my attention. I turned aside for a moment, and when I looked round again they had flown,—the race was lost."

" Ah, you were up there above us, when I called to

them to look at the bright path of sunlight. Did you see it?"

"Yes, and thought as mamma did, that it was a most glorious, heart-stirring sight."

"But you did not hear what mamma said about the fairy of enjoyment?" Cecil asked.

"No, Agnes; 'look there,' was the first intimation I had of your whereabouts."

The children had risen slowly, one by one, as if reluctant to break up their pleasant chat. And they now gathered round their father to detain him, until they had, between them, given him some account of their mother's fairy.

"Mamma is quite right," he said. "The sun always shines brightest, the cloud always gathers blackest, for those who are looking out for them. But now I am off for a brisk walk round the Knock—who will come with me?"

"All of us, all of us," they cried.

"I am afraid not all," said Mrs Gordon. "This poor little Colin has a lesson to learn before tea. He must go home at once, and I will go with him to keep him company, and comfort him."

"I declare, mamma, it is too bad that we should lose your company, only because Colin chose to be idle this forenoon, as he always is," cried Lionel, petulantly.

"Lionel, my boy," said his father, "do you not think that to lose the pleasant walk, and to go home to a tiresome lesson, form a grim enough cloud for poor Colin's spirit, without your increasing its darkness by unkind remarks?"

Lionel blushed, and cast a penitent look, first upon Colin, then upon his father. The two parties separated. Mrs Gordon and Colin turned towards the town.

Certainly the cloud upon Colin's spirit was sufficiently grim. He was wofully disconsolate. Mrs Gordon tried to amuse him, and to suggest pleasant trains of thought. But he seemed scarcely to hear, certainly not to attend to, what she said. His only comfort seemed to be in looking up to the Knock, wondering where the others had gone to, wishing he were with them, and in abusing Latin grammars, dictionaries, and translations with all the rancour of a thoroughly idle scholar.

When they got home, matters were no better. It seemed impossible for him to find a comfortable seat, or a place for his book. He growled at Bell because she had set out the tea equipage, and it came in his way ; asserted that the dictionary could not be found, and that one of the older boys had hidden it on purpose ; and when Mrs Gordon got it for him in the very place where it ought to have been, that she should find it when he could not, seemed more an insult than a favour.

Mrs Gordon bore with him for some time ; but as he grew worse instead of better, she tried the effect of a little friendly remonstrance.

“I gave up the pleasant walk for your sake,” she said ; “don't you think it would have been only fair that you should have tried to make the time which I gave up to you pass as pleasantly as you could ? Is it not both unfair and ungrateful, that you should make me so un-

comfortable by your murmurs, when but for you I might have been enjoying a charming walk?"

Colin was passionate, impulsive, and with little or no self-control, therefore a troublesome boy to those who had the charge of him. But he was also warm-hearted, and an appeal to his affections was generally successful. He was instantly convinced and softened by his mother's words.

"O mamma," he cried, "indeed I did not know that I was making you uncomfortable. I never meant to do it."

"It is a good thing to remember, my boy, that one member of a party cannot allow his spirits to get overcast without bringing more or less of a cloud over every other member. It is always disagreeable and depressing to look upon gloomy, discontented faces, to hear grumbling and complaining words."

"Well, mamma, see here. Is not my face brighter now? And you shall not hear another grumble. And really, you know," casting his eye down the page, "my lesson is not so very long, after all." And setting to work with hearty good-will at grammar and dictionary, the task was speedily accomplished, and without another complaint.

"Really, mamma," he cried, laughing at himself as he put away the books, "it was absurd to make such a fuss. I fancied somehow that it was a terribly long and most tremendously difficult lesson. But it was quite short, and much easier than yesterday's."

"It is, you see, as papa says, the sun shines brightest and the cloud gathers blackest for those who are looking out for them. You were determined to think that your lesson was a burden; and a burden, a very heavy burden, it became."

"Yes, mamma. And it is as you say too—I see it now. One person cannot be cross and glumly without making everybody else uncomfortable. I remember, at Lady Scott's cottage last summer, that often when we boys and Agnes, and the two Scott boys, were as happy and good-tempered as possible, Sophia Mildmay would put us all wrong by taking one of her sentimentally sad fits, sitting silent and glum, or speaking with a sigh soft and slow, or smiling like a kind of martyr who was resolved to seem cheerful for our sakes, although all the time her heart was breaking. But there are the others."

Yes, there were the others in a high state of excitement. They had met with an old man who had told them that long ago their cottage had been called Sunny Brae.

"And papa says he remembers something about it, and that he thinks it is a good name and a pretty name, and I am sure it is," said Agnes.

"Such a true name too," added Lionel; "how bonnily our orchard and garden lie down for the sun to shine on them. So Sunny Brae it is to be from this hour. Papa called in at the post-office to tell them."



CHAPTER IX.

SUNSHINE FROM WITHOUT.

THURSDAY was the market-day at Knock Earn. It was either the second or third Thursday after the Gordons had come to Sunny Brae, that Mrs Gordon had gone up to the sitting-room after dinner to write a note before going out to walk, when some of the boys burst in, saying breathlessly—

“O mamma, who do you think is here? Big John Campbell from Ferncairn.”

“Is he indeed? Where is he?” she cried, rising, and nearly as much excited as they were. “Did you ask him to come in? Why did not you bring him in?”

“Because he won’t come. He has taken a shy fit, and says it is not his place to come in and see us without an invitation. He wanted to see papa, and when we told him that he was away for the day, he said he could come back soon.”

“Oh, but he must come in. I must see him,” she cried. And without waiting to put on bonnet or shawl, she followed the boys out at the front door, and round to the corner of the house, where John Campbell was waiting their return.

Ferncairn was a farm upon the Eagle's Crag estate. John's forebears, as he called them, had held it for more than a hundred years. An honest, kindly, and thriving race they had always been, and John did no discredit to his name.

He it was, who, upon first hearing of the Gordons' misfortunes, left his farm in the very busiest of the spring work, and hastened to Edinburgh to seek Mr Gordon's man of business, and tell him that if fifty or a hundred, or even two hundred pounds of ready money would be of any use or comfort to the family, it was heartily at their service, to be repaid when and how best suited them, twenty years hence, or longer, if longer was more convenient.

He it was, too, who had sought out Gray, Mrs Gordon's maid, and offered to pay her wages in full for two years, if she would keep the matter secret, and remain in her place without seeking any remuneration from her mistress. Poor Gray was bitterly indignant that he should suppose any bribe was required to make her willing to cleave to her mistress in her misfortunes. But the offer did not do less credit to his tender heart and considerateness.

In the country-side he was called big, or tall John Campbell, to distinguish him from others of the same name, and, as the title implied, was above the common height. A fine-looking man he was, though perhaps his form was too spare, and his face too long. But there was no want of strength in the one, and if the other was *not* regularly handsome, it was at least singularly attrac-

tive and pleasing. It was a regular Scotch face. The Scotch high cheek-bones and length of jaw, but also the Scotch square, massive forehead, and clear blue eyes. In those blue eyes, and round the firm, well-shaped mouth, were many indications of his good, true, kindly nature, indications also of a certain shrewd, self-relying sagacity, of a mind which knew its own powers, could choose its own way, and keep to it in spite of all opposition.

And yet, manly, energetic, and strong as he was, both in body and mind, he had turned aside to cry like a child on that evening when he had, from behind a piece of rock, watched the Eagle's Crag carriage drive out of the avenue gate for the last time. And now, with all his self-possession and self-respect, he was bashful as any schoolboy, afraid, as it seemed, to take Mrs Gordon's offered hand, and ashamed to accept her invitation to come into the house. At Eagle's Crag her kindly shake of the hand had always been promptly met by one as hearty and warm; and at Eagle's Crag he had at once walked into the drawing-room when asked to do so, had taken his seat, and conversed with all the quiet ease and self-possession of a gentleman. But now, all honour to his good, true heart, he felt that adversity had raised the lady immeasurably above him. He would have liked to have stood uncovered in her presence, to have saluted her hand as if it had been that of a princess, and to enter her parlour seemed an honour of which he was unworthy.

Her appearance and manner reassured him a good

deal. The wind blew her curls over her face, and as she, laughing and bending down her head, strove to keep them in order, she looked so light-hearted, so much as she had always done, that he felt convinced, he hardly knew how, that misfortune had only passed over her outer life, had left her spirits untouched, at least uninjured. He consented to go in ; and when he had done so, his old simplicity, I might say dignity of manner, returned. He followed her into the sitting-room, and took the seat she offered, without one glance round either passage or room. He might have been sitting in a palace or a hovel, for all he seemed to know.

Mrs Gordon and the children had many questions to ask about all friends at Eagle's Crag, and he answered them with the heartiness and particularity of one who was himself interested in the welfare of all his neighbours, and who had the most perfect confidence in their being so too. After these questions were exhausted, it was his turn to open a new subject.

"The young gentlemen tell me that Eagle's Crag is from home, ma'am," he said.

"Yes, he was called away this morning to a place about twelve miles to the north of this. I daresay you must remember Dugald Cameron, who used to be at the mill?"

"Oh, to be sure, I mind him fine. He moved away only five years last Martinmas. He never took kindly to the place after his wife died, poor fellow."

"Well, he has lived ever since at this place up among *the hills*, and Mr Gordon had a letter from his son this

morning, saying that poor Dugald is very ill, dying, they think, in great distress of mind about religious matters, and craving most earnestly to see his old master, as he calls him. So, as the case seemed urgent, Mr Gordon set off at once. He meant to walk both ways, so that we cannot expect him till quite the evening. Can I do anything for you in his absence?"

"Well, ma'am, you see I had a great favour to ask of Eagle's Crag," he began, with the air of one preparing to tell a long story. His face had brightened, there was a great increase of ease in his manner. Mrs Gordon saw and understood it all. She felt that to his generous heart it was so pleasant to ask a favour from one who had once been so far above him, but was now nearly his equal. When he came, a little after, to what he feared might look like offering a favour to them, all his former bashfulness and timidity returned in double force.

"Can't I give any message, any explanation, to Mr Gordon? Or can you fix any time to come back, so that Mr Gordon could be sure to be at home?"

He thought that Mrs Gordon, if she would kindly take the trouble, could explain the case to Mr Gordon, and he had brought with him the papers upon which he wanted the latter's advice. The case was as creditable to his kindly, hearty nature, as all else that we have heard. A poor man, a common day-labourer on his farm, had lately found family papers, which seemed to prove that he was descended from an ancient and wealthy family in the south of Scotland. More than a hundred

years before, one of the sons of this house had quarrelled with his family, left them, and never again been heard of. He had gone out into the world, nearly penniless, to make his own way, but apparently with little success. From the papers found by this man, who was his grandson, or great-grandson, it seemed that he had descended to be a gentleman's groom, and his sons and grandsons had risen no higher. At the time of his leaving home, there were several older sons of the family ; but now, as John Campbell had found out, the only descendant left was a childless old man ; so that it seemed at least probable that the poor ploughman was heir to a large fortune and magnificent estate. John Campbell was willing to take any trouble to get the man his rights, and was generously ready to advance money for the law expenses, which might never be repaid did the case turn out different from what they expected. He had brought all the papers, and said it would be the greatest possible favour if Mr Gordon would look them over, and give an opinion upon them. If he advised it, John was willing to go to Edinburgh at once to lay them before the lawyer Mr Gordon might recommend.

Mrs Gordon undertook to state the case, and give her husband the papers, and promised for him that he should write to Campbell in the course of the next day, or of Saturday at furthest.

And then came the second part of Campbell's business, which was not so easily entered upon. He hesitated, and stammered, tried hard to appear at ease, and as if he thought the whole affair quite a matter of course,

but could not succeed, could not help reddening and looking ashamed.

He and some of the other farmers had, he said, bought the rabbits, pigeons, bantams, and other pets which had belonged to the young gentlemen and to Miss Agnes. The rabbits had come to his share. His lads and lassies, he said, had taken every care of them; and the common gray kind seemed doing well enough; but there were some finer sorts, some large white ones with long ears, and some others that were either more delicate or had been more petted and made of. Anyway, they were not so happy as they might be, and it would be the greatest comfort if the young gentlemen would just let him send them back; and maybe some time, when there were young ones, they would give his boys a pair, when maybe they would get on better.

When Mrs Gordon fully understood him, she hastened to remove his embarrassment by a most frank and hearty acceptance of his offer. She told him that she and Mr Gordon had been wishing that they could get some pets for their children. They had always been so accustomed to the occupation and amusement of looking after their favourites, that she had feared they must miss them; and they had not even a dog to amuse themselves with, as an old friend had died about a month before they left Eagle's Crag, and they had not got one to supply his place.

The delight of the young people was expressed in their faces as much as by their words. They were eager to get Campbell to go with them to see which of the

outhouses would be most suitable for a rabbit-house; and as he seemed to wish to see the premises, Mrs Gordon gave him over into their care.

There were plenty of outhouses from which to choose. A row, consisting of washing-house, hen-house, tool-house, and so on, ran down the west side of the garden; and the stable, coach-house, byre, and dairy, stood in a kind of corner to the east. Of these, the dairy, which looked in better repair, and neater than the others, caught the children's fancy; but Campbell, without giving any very intelligible reason, most vehemently opposed them, and persuaded them to take the hen-house, which, he said, they could easily fit up most conveniently for their pets. The house did not require much; but a little space must be enclosed in front of it to form a court-yard, in which they could get the fresh air and exercise to which they had been accustomed at Eagle's Crag. And Lionel, deeply impressed with the necessity of not spending money upon workmen, consulted Campbell as to how they could manage for themselves. He gave the best advice he could; but as the repairs in the house might occupy them all that day, he advised them to lay no settled plan until they could get their father to help them. He undertook to keep the rabbits until their house was ready; and it was settled that, if Mr and Mrs Gordon did not object, the boys should go to Ferncairn for a day, and bring their pets home with them. A public coach from Knock Earn passed through the village of Eagle's Crag every morning, and came back in *the afternoon*, so that the visit could easily be made out.

This arranged, the young Gordons led Campbell round their garden to display all its advantages. With the beautiful Eagle's Crag gardens in his mind, he felt surprised that they could be contented with this little commonplace affair, and could by no means understand the pleasure with which they pointed out a little arbour which stood about half-way down, and commanded a fine view, and enlarged upon the pleasantness of a small though very bonny plot of grass which extended under the dining-room window.

"And does this too belong to you, Master Lionel?" he asked, looking over the paling into the orchard.

"Yes, and it is such a sunny, pleasant place," Lionel answered, "and the fruit-trees are all in capital order. The gate is in the east corner there; come in, and see our trees."

Campbell accepted the invitation, but the fruit-trees occupied less of his attention than the grass. He stood still several times to look round, paced the whole orchard in both its length and breadth, and seemed much pleased by its extent. It was excellent grass, he said, and the trees were not too close; there were many open spots where the grass grew fine, and there was as much grass as would feed two cows grandly.

As the children had no idea that they should ever possess either one or two cows, they paid little attention to his calculations, and were in truth somewhat mortified at the absent air with which he heard their account of the different good kinds of apple and pear-trees under which they passed. He roused himself from his absence of

mind as they went again into the garden, and he looked round with fresh interest to mark how it was cropped.

Stupidly enough, in truth. Before Mr Colin Gordon had known that his nephew would occupy Sunny Brae, he had written to a gardener in Knock Earn, who had always taken charge of the garden, to desire him to put it in order, lest the place should be let. He had left the cropping of it entirely to the man's discretion; and, as the cheapest and least troublesome mode of proceeding, he had laid down the whole in potatoes—the whole, except one small plot, which would have shared the same fate had not the old gardener been taken ill. And this piece of ground lay wild and untouched since the winter's storms. A border of fruit-trees, currant, and gooseberry bushes, intermixed with a few roses and other common flowers, ran on each side of the gravel walks, which divided the garden into four equal parts; and within this border on all sides grew the unvarying potatoes.

"It is a real pity that there should be no peas or beans, or such green vegetables," said Campbell; "the mistress has always been used to them."

"Well, it is indeed," said Agnes, "and all the more so, that Nelly says the people tell her that there is no garden in the neighbourhood where we can buy such things. And papa likes peas and cauliflower I know, and so does mamma."

"Cauliflower!" repeated Campbell, catching at the word. "Well, I'll tell you what, Master Lionel. We *have been* planting out our young plants of cauliflower,

and have a great many more than we want. If you would be so good as to allow me to send a bundle, you could put them in this vacant plot. They would just be thrown to the pigs if you did not want them. They are of no manner of use to us."

Lionel and Agnes eagerly and gratefully accepted the offer.

"And what must be done to the ground?" asked Lionel. "Malcolm, you and I must set about it at once."

As I have said, the ground had not been touched since the previous summer. It was full of tangled weeds, rough and hard. Campbell looked doubtfully from it to the figures of the two lads, and shook his head.

"I'm afeard it's past your strength, Master Lionel," he said.

"Not a bit," both the boys exclaimed; "only tell us what to do, and we'll begin this minute."

"But, Lionel," objected Colin, "we must get our rabbit-house ready for our rabbits."

"Hold your tongue, you little fool," was Lionel's imperious answer; "as if our rabbits were to be attended to before mamma's cauliflower."

"I'm sure I don't want"—Colin began, hotly.

"Well, if you don't want, where's the use of talking? Just be quiet, can't you?" Lionel interrupted. "Please, Mr Campbell, what must we do?"

"Well, sir, the first thing is to give it a good deep delving from end to end. Put pith to it, and drive the spade down as deep as you can. Break the clods as

you throw them up. But they 'll be gey stiff. So, when you 've got once over it, you had better just begin at the beginning again, and dig it a second time. That 'll no be so hard ; and then dress the ground a bit with the rake, and that 'll do all you want. Do ye know how to set the plants ? ”

“ I think I do. Anyway, papa can show us.”

“ Ay, ay, nobody better than him. Eagle's Crag knows how to do everything better than most folks. And so, gentlemen, I must be steppin' my ways home ; my humble respects to your papa and mamma, and you 'll let me know when you 're ready for the rabbits.”

They promised to do so, and with all proper courtesy went with him to the outer gate, and watched him striding up the hill, with his long vigorous steps. When he had disappeared round the corner, the two big boys hastened to the tool-house, where they had seen a good deal of gardening gear, to find the spades and rakes necessary for their work. Agnes went with them to give what help she could, and to see what they found. And Cecil ran up to the sitting-room to see if his mamma were nearly ready for the walk, in which she had promised that he and Agnes should be her companions.

Colin, in the meantime, had stalked into the house under a lofty sense of injury and virtuous indignation.

What right had Lionel to speak in that way to him ? What business had he to call him a fool ? Well, if he was such a fool, of course they could not want his help, and it would be long enough before they should get it.

That he could tell them. And he tried to comfort himself with the thought that they would be glad enough to have him work with them, sorry enough that they had offended him.

Comfort was in truth necessary. As he sat by the open window in the dining-room, the merry voices of the three at the tool-house came to his ear. He could hear the pleasant rattling about of flower-pots, spades, and hoes, as they turned them over in search of what they wanted; and by the frequent exclamations, he was sure that they were making most exciting and interesting discoveries. He longed to be with them, to pull about the things, and discover for himself. But, of course, it would have been beneath his dignity to offer his company where it was not asked for, and such a proceeding as his now going out to help could not be thought of unless Lionel should first apologise for his speech. So he took up "Robinson Crusoe," in which he had two days before been much interested, and he tried to revive the excitement with which he had then read of the building of Robinson's hut, or of his anxiety about the savages.

But not very successfully. He turned impatiently from the one passage to the other. Now they seemed quite tame and stupid, and visions of spades and rakes, and merry, cheerful, hard digging came ever between his mind and his book. Then Lionel and Malcolm passed each with a spade over his shoulder, and Agnes followed dragging a long rake in each hand; and the boys looked so happy and so full of business, in their shirt-sleeves, and talking fast and eagerly of what was to be done, that

all chance of attending to Robinson and his hut was completely lost.

After a few minutes, Agnes came singing up the gravel walk. She was coming in to get ready for her walk with her mamma ; but she caught a glimpse of Colin's disconsolate face at the dining-room window, and turned in to see what was wrong with him.

" Do you go with us, Colin ? " she asked, pleasantly, " or are you going to help the big boys ? I think they would be much the better of your help."

" Oh, I daresay. They can ask it, then," was his petted answer. " Of course they don't want a little fool to help them."

" O Colin, never mind these hasty words," she said, smiling. " Lionel did not mean them."

" He has no business to call me a fool."

" No, he has not. And he did not mean to do it. He only spoke quickly and roughly, because he fancied that you wanted them to put off getting the ground ready for the cauliflower until the rabbit-house was all done."

" But he might have known that I should care as much as he did about mamma's having cauliflower," he said, hotly. " As if I didn't care as much for mamma as he does. As if I"—

" Never mind any more ' as ifs,' " she interrupted, playfully. " Never mind what he said or did not say. It is of no consequence. It is all over now. He would be quite sorry to think he had vexed you."

" I don't believe he would."

" Well, well, never mind what you believe or think, or

anything. Forget all about it, that is the best way, and come away out, and help them to make the ground ready for the plants—the plants for mamma, you know, Colin," she said, coaxingly.

It was not natural to Agnes to coax or persuade any one. She was like Lionel in character—like him, rather inclined to look upon all weakness or folly with contempt or scorn. But their change of life had been good for her. The only big girl among so many boys, and with so few servants, she was now called upon to perform many little services for one and another; had learned to be watchful over the comfort of the others, and to like to help. Colin resisted a little longer, but she only pleaded more earnestly.

"Dear Colin," she said, putting her arm round his neck, "you know papa says that God wishes us not to please ourselves, but to do everything we can to make other people happy. Mamma said a little ago, that good John Campbell's interest in us, and his affection, did her very heart good, and was a bright bit of sunshine into our life of to-day. You would not like to cloud it, I am sure; and yet you know that she is never happy nor comfortable when she sees anything wrong with us. For her sake, Colin, come and help Lionel."

He did not say he would; but he suffered her to draw him out of the house. And when she advised him to go to the tool-house for a spade, he went, slowly, reluctantly, but still he went.

Agnes, when she saw him fairly on his way, ran down to where the other two were, that she might persuade

them to receive him kindly. This was an easier task than the other. Lionel had, as she supposed, forgotten the whole business. He was imperious and dictatorial, but generous. And that very overweening sense of his own superiority, which made him so inclined to lord it over the others, prevented him from making too much of any rebellion against his authority. It seemed so perfectly natural to him that he should be head, that he never thought the others could seriously dispute his title.

The only difficulty with him was, that he felt greatly inclined to laugh at Colin's pet. It was so absurd, he said, to go moping and sulking about for a hard or hasty word.

Agnes had recourse to the same argument which she had used with Colin, and begged him not to mind whether it was absurd or not, or anything about it, but to be kind and pleasant to Colin for mamma's sake, if not for Colin's own.

Lionel did not promise much, only he said he should do his best. And Agnes was quite satisfied, confident that Lionel always did as he said, and that his "best" was better than most other people's.

"Only, you know," he said, looking round upon the tangled weeds and hard ground, "I can't see that the little fellow can do much here. This is a pretty tough job, I can tell you, far beyond his strength."

"But," she urged, "Campbell said that it must be twice dug. You can let him go over what you have *finished*."

"Ay, indeed," he replied, but with perfect good humour. "So Malcolm and I are to break our backs with the hard work, and leave the pleasant to him, because he has chosen to be petted. That is fine justice, Mrs Nesty."

She only laughed, and ran back to the house, in obedience to a summons from her mother, who was at the sitting-room window. Colin, generally so quick and hasty, was now so slow in all his movements, that he and his spade had not reached the green arch leading into the garden by the time Agnes had passed through it again. She saw him coming along the paved walk from the outhouses, and gave him an encouraging nod and smile, as she hastened into the house quite happy, quite sure that Lionel was both able and willing to make matters go pleasantly.

And so it proved. True, he did cast a sly, smiling glance upon Malcolm, as he first caught the expression, partly shy, partly proud and sullen, upon the face of the slowly advancing Colin ; and his manner towards him was rather like the condescension of a full-grown man to a petted child. But Colin was so glad to be lifted out of his uncomfortable state of pettedness, and to be received on easy, friendly terms, that he did not perceive the smile, did not feel the condescension. He liked the work given him to do, set to it heartily, and before a quarter of an hour was over, they were all three laughing and talking as easily and merrily as if nothing had happened.

In the midst of all the talking, however, Lionel found

time to reflect that it was indeed a pleasant thing to try to make others feel pleasantly and comfortably. And he soon and readily turned the reflection to good use. He had begun to dig at the top of the plot, Malcolm at the middle, and they had purposed each to finish out his own half. But Lionel was the strongest, perhaps also the most constantly industrious. His half was finished while Malcolm had still nearly two rows to dig. He thought Malcolm looked tired ; and although it was tempting to see how easily and quickly Colin got through with the second turning over of the ground, and although he did wish pretty strongly to join him, he thought it right to take the hard work upon himself, and send Malcolm to share Coljn's. Malcolm never would have complained, but he was very grateful for the rest ; and in the increased harmony and pleasantness of feeling among them, Lionel was rewarded for the little self-denial.

“ This has certainly been a most brightly happy day,” he said to his mamma, as they went in the evening to meet Mr Gordon on his return. “ I’m sure big John Campbell’s visit has been a bright thing for us all. Sunshine has come to us from without to-day, mamma.”

“ From within too, I think,” she answered, smiling ; “ I think you have all been kind and pleasant to each other, and that is the most lasting home sunshine. We cannot make it come from without ; but we can do a good deal to keep it shining within doors.”



CHAPTER X.

THE ARRIVAL OF TINY AND BEARDIE, AND THE BUSTLE CONSEQUENT THEREON.

HE next forenoon, when Colin and Cecil were busy with their father in the study, and Agnes and the other two at their French lesson in the sitting-room, Bell opened the door, and putting in only her face, said, a little mysteriously—

“If you please, Master Lionel, the boy from Fern-cairn is here, and he has brought the plants, and wad like to see ye.”

“He’ll have brought some message about them, I daresay. Mamma, may I go and see him?”

“And I too?” “And I?” eagerly begged Malcolm and Agnes.

“Well, I think one of you might do to get the message. But, however, I suppose you must,” she said, smiling good-humouredly, as she saw that they had closed their books and risen from their seats before hearing her answer.

They waited for no further parley, but hastened down the steep stairs at a rate that made her draw a long sigh

of relief when she heard them reach the bottom in safety. At the door into the garden stood Bell with the cauliflower plants in her apron, her face beaming with some mysterious delight.

“Out at the garden gate, Master Lionel,” she said, almost breathlessly.

They ran along the paved path, round the corner, and there, just outside the gate, stood a beautiful dun-coloured cow. *A* dun-coloured cow! Was it not *the* dun-coloured cow? Their own Tiny, their little beauty, their pet? There she stood, with her sleek, shining coat, her pretty small head with its fine pointed ears, and large, kindly eyes. Nelly was there too, stroking Tiny’s broad forehead, and nearly out of her senses with joy; and the farmer lad stood with the rope in his hand, grinning from ear to ear, and pulling at his cap in honour of the young lady.

“O Tiny, Tiny,” cried Agnes, throwing her arms round the gentle creature’s neck. “My dear Tiny, our own Tiny, how glad I am to see you! But who sent you? How are you here?”

“Master bid me say,” began the boy. But he was interrupted by the loud, eager questions and exclamations of the boys, and the equally hurried explanations of the women who had come partly to understand the business. He tried again and again to disburden himself of the carefully delivered message, until at last his determination to do exactly as he had been told, prevailed over the tumult of joy and surprise, and he was allowed to say out his say.

"Master bid me say that he'd bought the beast because she was sich a raal fine breed, but she's that thrawn and petted"—

"Thrawn indeed!" cried Nelly, in bitter indignation; "she's jist the best, maist easily handled beast that ever I came across."

The lad grinned, as if he thought that little trouble had been taken to reconcile the rather petted Tiny to her new milkers. He had a strong suspicion that both his master and mistress had been glad to make the most of her little whims, so as to have a good excuse for returning her to her former owners. But he said nothing about it, only went steadily on with his message.

"Sae he keepit her till she calved, and it was a fine quey, and that was a' he wanted, to keep up the breed. And he wad be muckle obleeged if Eagle's Crag wad jist tak back the baste, as maister doesna want her nohow."

"Oh, and we are so glad to have her," cried the children in a breath.

"And Campbell o' the Brooms," continued the lad, "he bought the ither little one, her with the brown and white."

"Beardie?" suggested Agnes.

"I dinna ken her name. But she's a bonny, fine-made, short-legged beast, jist like this ane. The others were a' bigger and heavier-like."

"Very bonny they a' were," Nelly said, a little jealously; "although Tiny and Beardie were aye abune the lave for raal gentiness."

"And Campbell o' the Brooms, he bought that brown

ane jist for the leddy, an' he wad hae sent her through the day, but the lad that was to bring her is awa to his mither's, an' he'll bring her the morn's mornin'."

"But Beardie's calf was born andⁱ sold before we left Eagle's Crag," said Agnes. "Poor Mr Campbell of the Brooms has no calf. It is a pity to take Beardie from him."

"He sall get her calf next simmer, if we're a' spared," said Nelly, briskly. "An' surely, Miss Agnes, ye wad never think o' Tiny's being alone in the field. She'd jist fret her very heart out for company."

"He jist bought her for the leddy," said the boy. "He's no wantin' her. And now," to Nelly, "is she going in here, or straight to the park?"

"Oh, mamma must see her first," cried the children; "we'll run and call her."

"Bring her to the front door, and we'll take Tiny round," cried Nelly.

And so Tiny was conducted in great state round the corner of the house to the front door, one of the maids on each side, a hand affectionately on her shoulder, and the lad following. Mrs Gordon was greatly pleased to see her favourite again, to know that she could be sure of plenty of rich fresh milk for the little ones; most of all rejoiced and touched by the thoughtful affection of her old friends. She fully understood how impossible it would have been for John Campbell to have told her of his intentions, and fully appreciated the delicacy which had made both farmers choose that mode of presenting the gifts which might be least embarrassing to her.

She was looking round to bid the boys run and tell their father, when Colin and Cecil came up from the garden. The kitchen was next the study, and Colin, observant of everything except his lessons, had heard and been made restless by the first bustle excited in that small domain, when a neighbour's boy ran in to say, "that there was a man wi' a cow for Mr Gordon, at the muckle yett, and he didna ken whaur to gang to." He had heard also, though less distinctly, the hubbub of talking that arose at the gate when Nelly and Bell first saw their friend, and finally the frantic rush of the boys and Agnes down-stairs and along the paved road under the windows. He had tried in vain to excite his father's curiosity, and had drawn upon himself one or two sharp rebukes for inattention, when, behold! Tiny marched majestically past the window, attended as I have described. Colin did not recognise her ladyship, but he saw Bell and Nelly, and he could no longer preserve even a semblance of decorum.

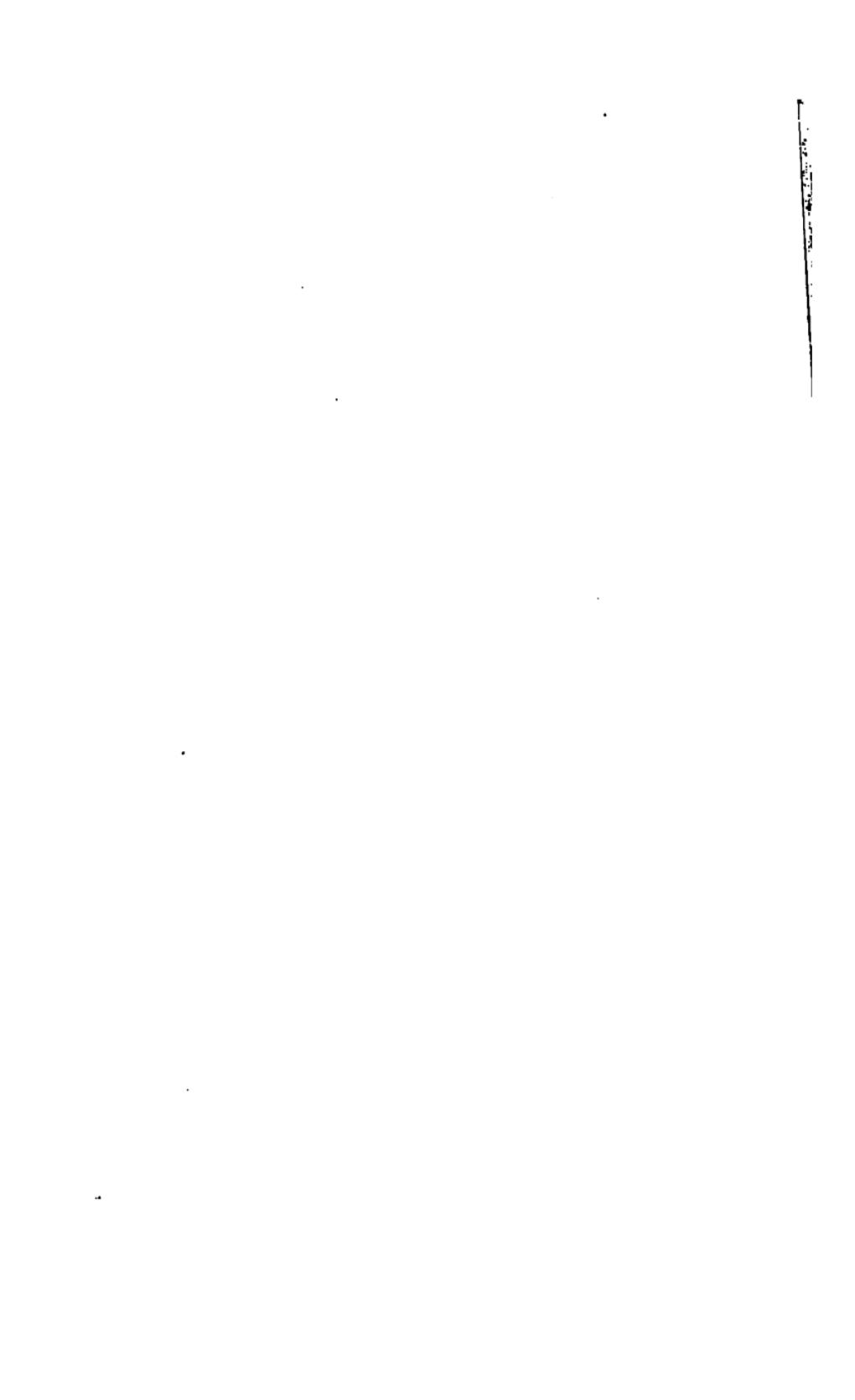
"Papa, papa!" he cried, springing from his seat, "oh do please let us run out for just a minute. I am sure something is going on."

And Mr Gordon, seeing that his curiosity was irresistible if not excusable, gave the permission, only desiring them to come back as soon as they had found out what the mystery was. He did not go with them. He fancied that the women might have found a neighbour's cow trespassing in the garden, and were conveying it home. So he took up his pen to make the most of the few minutes' cessation from lessons. He was not long left

in peace. Presently there was a tapping on his window, a crowd of eager faces looking in, a tumult of eager voices pouring out the news. He could no longer even try to be busy. He must go and share the pleasant excitement of the others.

The whole family were now assembled. Mary and the three little ones, passing the end of the road in the course of their forenoon walk, had been attracted by the group round the door, and had come to swell the number of Tiny's welcomers and admirers.

Of course lessons could no more be thought of for that day. Tiny had to be escorted to her new domain in the orchard by all the children. The big gate by which she could get in was at the bottom of the hill, and they all went with her, crowding round her on each side, before, behind, scarcely permitting her to get on,—Nelly still keeping her place near the head, Bell following with Mary, the cauliflower plants still huddled up in her apron. Once inside the orchard, Tiny was not allowed to choose morsels for herself. Every one was busy gathering handfuls of the sweetest, most cloverly grass they could find. And several times did the stately dame turn away her head in utter scorn of the officiousness which would have thrust one handful into her mouth before she had duly discussed the one before. Mr and Mrs Gordon had gone down the garden, and stood leaning over the paling, watching the scene with much amusement. After a while, the cauliflower plants got some attention. Lionel and Agnes brought them up to the paling in triumph, *to show how fine they were.*



1. *What is the relationship between the number of species and the number of individuals in a community?*

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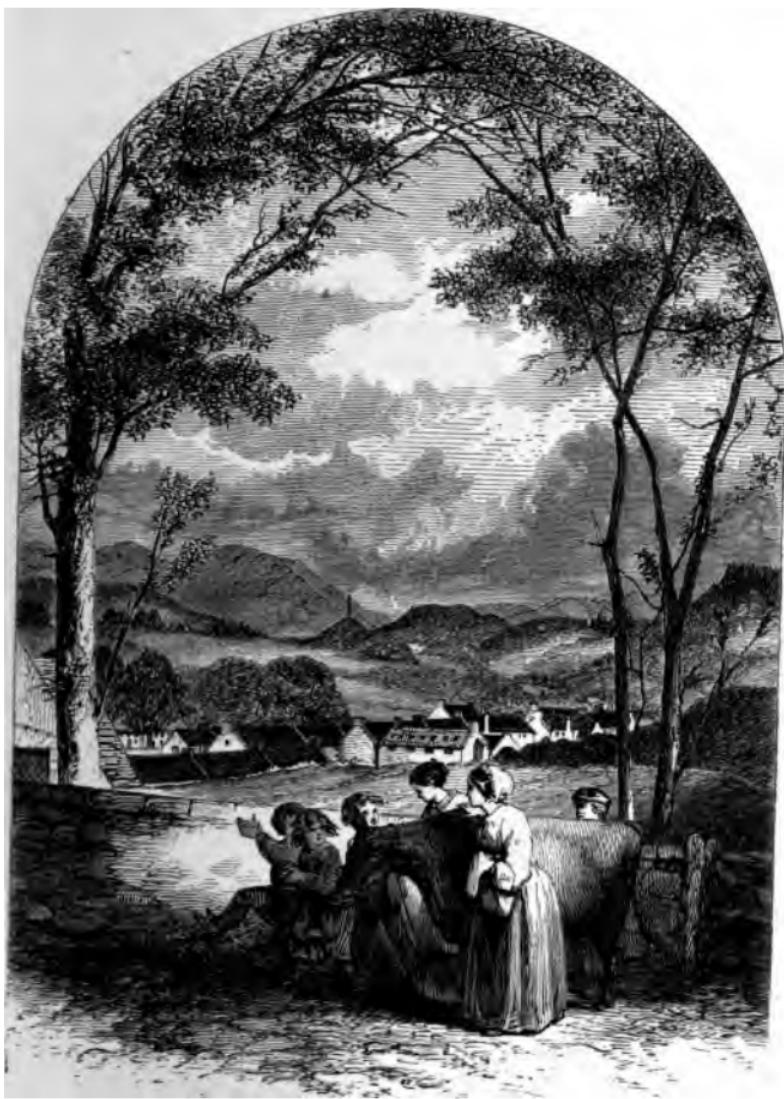
16. *What is the relationship between the number of species and the number of individuals in a community?*

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20. *What is the relationship between the number of species and the number of individuals in a community?*



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"You must get them put in, my boy, while they are fresh," said Mr Gordon.

"Yes, papa, immediately. We are going to do it immediately; and Nelly says that the wire gauze of the dairy window must be renewed, and the door mended. We must see about that," said Lionel, with an air of great importance.

"The dairy!" repeated Agnes. "Oh, don't you remember, Lionel, how we wondered why Mr Campbell was so anxious to keep us from taking the dairy for our rabbit-house? He must have been thinking about Tiny's coming."

"Yes," cried Malcolm, who had now joined them. "And don't you remember how he measured the orchard, and said so often, 'There is good grass for two cows.' We could not think what he was after."

"The only thing that makes me regret the arrival of Tiny and Beardie," Mrs Gordon began.

She was interrupted by indignant exclamations.

"Regret! O mamma! Regret getting our darling wee ewies again!"

"Well," she said, laughing, "the only thing that interferes with my perfect satisfaction is the thought that the servants must lose this nice sunny corner for their bleaching-green."

"And Ned and Willie for their morning play-ground, mamma," suggested Agnes. "It suits you so nicely to put them in here while Mary is busy, when you have anything to take you away from them for a minute or so."

"As if Tiny or Beardie would touch the children!" said one of the boys, indignantly.

"They certainly would never mean to hurt them," Mrs Gordon said. "But there is no saying what adventurous Master Ned might choose to do. I could not leave Willie beside the cows, gentle as they are, with no better guard than him."

"But, papa," cried Lionel, who had been listening in silent thoughtfulness, "why should not we enclose this open corner for a washing green for the maids, and playground for the little ones?"

"Do you mean to do it yourself? And how do you propose setting about it?" Mr Gordon asked.

"Well, papa, Malcolm and I were speaking last night about the fence for our rabbits' court-yard. We thought that we should like to make a kind of basket-work one, something like what we once made round our gardens. You remember, papa, do you not?"

"I think I do. It was a fancy of your own, was it not? You drove in strong stakes at equal distances apart, and worked osiers in between them."

"Yes, papa, and I know we can get osiers from that nursery-garden under Fern Hill. That would be the best kind of fence for the rabbits. And even out here, for good quiet cows like Tiny and Beardie, it would be strong enough."

"And then," added Malcolm, "while Lionel and I can do the hard work, driving in the stakes, Agnes and the boys can work in the osiers."

"The fence would be strong enough, I believe," said

Mr Gordon ; "but I think it will be best to give the enclosing of the green into the carpenter's hands. You have a good many other little things to do ; and it would be a tedious job as you propose to do it."

"We should not care about its being tedious," Lionel urged, eagerly. "We should like to do it. We should not care how long it might take."

"You think so just now, my boy, but you might think differently before it was done. At any rate, there ought to be no unnecessary delay. I should like the servants to have the green before next washing day, before Tuesday."

"But we could manage that, I 'm sure," he cried, eagerly. "To-morrow is a holiday. We can work all day to-morrow, all this afternoon and evening, and all Monday afternoon and evening. Indeed, I think we could manage it."

Mr Gordon shook his head. Lionel would not be discouraged.

"Really, papa," he urged, "I am sure we can do it. When once the stakes are made, Malcolm and I can drive them in in no time."

"I don't exactly know what 'in no time' means. But the stakes are neither got yet nor made. You have a good many little things to do this afternoon. You cannot well calculate upon beginning before to-morrow. And, even if you could drive in the stakes as quickly as you think, which I doubt, the weaving of the osiers is a tedious process. I like the feeling which makes you boys so willing to take work in hand, now that we can-

not well afford to employ workmen ; but in this case I believe you must submit to call in the carpenter."

"And to-day, when so much has happened to give us pleasure," Mrs Gordon said, persuasively, "it won't be so difficult to give up with a good grace this one pleasure more."

It was never very easy for Lionel to give up his own way with a good grace. But in this case he tried hard to do it ; and success was made more easy when his mother went on to say—

"Then I had formed a little plan for my own pleasure, which I must trust to you boys to carry out. Now that this piece of the orchard is to be enclosed, I should like so much to have a narrow border all round it for primroses, cowslips, and other wild flowers, like the wild-flower garden I used to have up the side of the Den at Eagle's Crag."

Lionel's face brightened, and the idea pleased the fancy of all the youngsters. Agnes grew eloquent upon the pleasure of long excursions among the woods and hills in search of roots.

"And who knows," she said, "but that we may find plants here which we did not get at Eagle's Crag ?"

"That is not very likely," said Colin, scornfully. "It is not very likely that we shall get anything here that we cannot get much better at Eagle's Crag. But there may be many plants there which you have not here ; and if we boys go over any day, we can bring you back roots."

Mr Gordon turned to go to the house. Lionel jumped

over the paling to get after him, that he might ask directions about planting out the cauliflower plants. Agnes carried the plants round to the gate.

“I only want to know how far apart they should be,” Lionel said, apologetically, as he saw his father look at his watch.

“Well,” said Mr Gordon, with a good-humoured smile, “I suppose I may as well give you until dinner-time. I’ll set you agoing with your planting, Lionel, and then go to the carpenter to speak about the paling, and about the branches you require for your stakes. Is there a gardener’s line anywhere?”

The boys did not know, but they ran off to the tool-house to seek one. Mr Gordon measured the proposed bed, and calculated how many plants would be required. Agnes, kneeling on the gravel walk, unpacked the bundle, and laid out the plants in rows. They had been most carefully packed with a good deal of earth about the roots, and were fine, short-necked, vigorous little fellows.

“There are more than enough,” said Mr Gordon, separating them. “We can plant out the best, and put the others in that vacant space under the wall, that we may have some to fill up blanks should any such occur.”

Malcolm and Colin came back with a piece of small rope in their hands. They could find no right line, they said, but Bell had given them this, and Lionel had found a short, thick piece of stick, which he was pointing and notching, that it might do instead of that kind of iron frame upon which the gardener’s line is wound. Mr

Gordon sent Malcolm to seek a sharp, strong piece of stick for the other end of the line, and he and Agnes set themselves to straighten and disentangle the rope, which was knotted and twisted.

By the time they had got a proper length all right, Lionel came down with his piece of stick, short and thick, pointed at one end, and with a deep notch cut in it near the other. He wound the rope round it, as boys wind the string for their kites, and the notch prevented it from unwinding further than he chose. It did pretty well, but was not so convenient as the regular frame of the gardener's line, which is so constructed as that a simple turn of the hand checks the string at any point. Lionel and Agnes were forced to make several trials before they got their rope fixed over the notch at precisely the proper length. Malcolm had made ready a sharp stick, to which the other end of the line was fastened. And when the two stakes were stuck into the ground, the one at the top, the other at the bottom of the bed, the rope was stretched tightly between them, two or three inches from the ground, and guided Lionel to put his plants in a seemly, straight line.

All this the boys understood, and got done handily enough. Mr Gordon then set the first row of plants for them, that he might show them exactly how to make the hole in the ground with the dibble, and then put the plant in, and gently press the earth round the roots. He meant to leave them to do the other rows themselves. The only difficulty lay in measuring the distances between the rows and between the plants. About a foot

was the proper distance, and the business was simple enough to Mr Gordon, as the sole of his foot was so nearly a foot long as to make it a pretty sure guide. The boys' feet were too short. Mr Gordon lent them a foot-rule, by which they could accurately measure the distance between the rows; and in their desire to be quite correct, they measured off their line into feet, tying little bits of string at every foot, to guide them as they went down. To Lionel was given the honourable task of planting, and Agnes attended him to hand the plants, to take up and put in the one end of the line, while he moved the other from row to row, as each was completed.

“Now,” said Mr Gordon, as he saw that they thoroughly understood the business, “I am going to the carpenter. How many stakes shall you require, boys, for your rabbits’ court?”

They had measured, they said, and thought that six down each side would be enough, and eight along the bottom, besides some pieces of board for the door. The height ought to be three feet and a half. Mr Gordon was pleased at the care with which they had made their calculations, and promised to do the best for them that he could. Colin asked leave to go with him, and was readily allowed to do so. But Cecil caught him as he was running off.

“Stay a minute,” he said. “Where there is so much to do, ought not we to be doing something? Lionel, could not we be digging up the border for mamma’s flowers?”

"No, no, nonsense ; you have not half pith enough. It will be pretty tough work, you may depend upon it," was Lionel's not too gracious answer.

"Well, then, there is the ground of the court-yard ; it has all to be broken up with the pickaxe. We might begin there."

"I think I see you," Lionel said, still more unpleasantly. "Why, you poor spoon, you could not even lift the pickaxe."

Cecil turned away, mortified and depressed.

"Well, if we can be of no use," cried Colin, "at least let us have our fun. Come, Cecil, let us have a race up after papa."

"No, I can't race up hill with you," Cecil said, sadly, walking to the further end of the garden, while Colin ran off by himself.

Lionel was too busy to mark the effect of his hasty words. Mrs Gordon, standing near mending Ned's whip, saw and heard all ; and as soon as she had finished her work, she went to join Cecil.

He was leaning over the gate into the orchard. Mrs Gordon proposed that they should go down and see how Tiny was getting on in her new home. As they walked down the more open part, they looked over to the beautiful wooded park of St Michael's, with the near Black Hill on the one side, the distant Ochils on the other. The sun was shining down the east end of the Black Hill, and upon a little strip of moorland, which, at that point, came between the trees of St Michael and the sky. *In general, the strip looked bare and uninterest-*

ing. In general, the eye passed it by unobservant, to dwell upon the beauty and variety of the hill, or of the park ; but now in the sunlight it looked strangely attractive and pleasant, giving one a desire to be there, to tread its heather and moss. Mrs Gordon pointed it out to Cecil. He looked, but seemed uninterested, too much depressed to be otherwise.

“ You don’t care for that lovely bit of moorland,” she said, smiling. “ Your mind is too full of sad thoughts, eh, Cecil ? ”

“ Yes, mamma—no, mamma—that is, I don’t know. I don’t mean ; but, mamma,” with sudden vehemence, “ it is a grief not to be strong like other boys.”

“ It is indeed, my dear boy,” she answered, tenderly, “ a sore grief to you, and to me too, Cecil. I think you know how much I feel it for your sake.”

He did not speak, but looked up gratefully, his heart already lightened of half its load. After a minute, Mrs Gordon said again—

“ The great comfort for us both is to know that the grief has been laid upon us by the Father in heaven, who doeth *all* things well.”

“ Yes, mamma,” he said, earnestly, “ I know, I feel that. In general, I think I feel that.”

“ In general, I think you do ; but perhaps not quite at this moment, do you ? ”

“ Well, mamma, you see there is a difference,” he said, after a moment’s thought. “ It is easiest to bear the grief of not being able to run about and play like the others. It is more difficult to bear the grief of not

being able to do something for you all, of being of no use."

"Certainly it is," she answered, heartily; "but the comfort in that matter is to be sure that when God bids us help one another, bear one another's burdens, He will certainly give us some way of doing it. If He does not give you strength, He gives you love and kindness, where-with to help and comfort all who come near you."

He looked up and smiled a little through the tears which had gathered as he spoke of his own weakness. They had come to Tiny, and patted and admired her. They went on to the end of the orchard, and then turned to come up again.

"And what made you feel your weakness so much just now?" Mrs Gordon asked.

"Well, you see, mamma, there is a great deal to do, and it would certainly have been a good thing if I had been able to dig up and dress those borders for your wild flowers."

"No, it would not," she said, smiling. "If you had dug them up and dressed them to-day, the men putting up the paling would have trampled and spoiled them to-morrow. It is far better to wait until the paling is finished, until Tiny and Beardie are securely kept out."

"At least," he said, "I could have done some good in preparing the court for our rabbits, if I had been as strong as Lionel."

"Perhaps so; but as Lionel is nearly fourteen, and you barely ten, it is not quite reasonable—is it?—to expect to be as strong as he is, or to fret because you are not."

Upon such a system, I might be inconsolable because I am not so strong as papa. Blanche might be mortified because she cannot play on the piano like Agnes, or little Willie, because he cannot reach anything on the table without standing on tiptoe, although you can. Or, indeed, we might as well all sit down in a circle and weep, and lament that we are not as clever as papa is, and do not know many things that he knows."

"O mamma," he cried, laughing, "I never was so bad as that; and really, you know, I am not even so strong as Colin, who is the same age. I am not so useful as he is."

"Not so strong, I grant; not so useful, I deny. You are more useful. He is stronger, but you are far more accurate and attentive. Ask either of the big boys, and they will tell you that they can get much more efficient, more reliable help from you than from Colin."

Again he looked up brightly, gratefully. Mrs Gordon asked if the cloud was all dispersed, if he had told all his grievances.

"I felt too," he said, looking down again; "but that was foolish and discontented, only I did feel that I could not even run races with Colin."

"You can't run races up hill. Well, to a boy it is a grief, I know, not to be able to do exactly as other boys do; but still, my little Cecil, the fun of the race would have been over any way before I came up to you at the gate just now. It was perhaps not quite reasonable to be fretting then because you had not had it."

"No, it was not, mamma; but I don't know how it

was that everything looked so black and dreary. I don't know how I came to think so much of the troubles."

"In a way which we are all liable to fall into. A little discomfort happens to us, and instead of looking it bravely in the face, and quietly measuring its real extent, we brood over it, and let it lie pressing upon our spirits, until we get thoroughly wretched, and make others so too. You naturally felt a little mortified at Lionel's contempt for your power to work ; and instead of finding out exactly how much a power to work was wanted from you at the time, you allowed yourself to think all kinds of sad and untrue thoughts, as that you were useless, and I don't know what all, until you had nearly made yourself a burden to yourself and to every one else."

They were now again in the garden. Lionel and Agnes were still hard at work. But even as Cecil and his mamma came up to them, Nelly made her appearance to beg Lionel to come and look at the door of her dairy.

"I must milk Tiny soon," she said, "and the door must be mended first, or where can I put the milk? The larder did well enough for the poor, bought stuff ; but I am not going to put Tiny's beautiful fresh milk in there."

Lionel said that he should come as soon as he had finished planting the cauliflowers.

"I can do your part," said Agnes ; "and here is Cecil to take mine. Cecil is so handy and careful, and has

such a good eye, he can set the line much straighter than I can."

Lionel agreed. Cecil's face coloured with pleasure at Agnes's words, and at Lionel's hearty reply—

"To be sure, Cecil is one of the most useful, exact little fellows that ever lived. No one can do better than Cecil."

He knew as little of the good he did to his brother's heart by this speech, as of the pain he had given by the two former ones. But as Mrs Gordon went up the garden with him, she told him how much he had mortified poor Cecil, and asked him to be more cautious for the future. He promised readily, and, as I said before, a promise from Lionel could well be relied upon.

The young work-people were diligent. Before dinner the cauliflower planting was finished, the dairy window mended, some loose pegs fastened, and the door, by dint of judicious oiling and planing, made to turn smoothly on its hinges, and to submit to be locked.

"There," cried Malcolm, as the last fact was satisfactorily ascertained, "that business is well done; we are ready now for our own work."

At the same moment Mr Gordon and Colin came in at the gate. They were met by many questions as to where they had been, or how it had taken so much time to settle with the carpenter.

"Oh," Colin said, with an important air, "we have done a great deal for you."

"Have you got the wood, papa?" Lionel asked.

"Yes, quite as much as you can require, although

perhaps not exactly as you might have liked to have it. For economy's sake, I bought a lot of unsorted branches, for which the carpenter had little use, but out of which I believe you may get much more than you want. I took them just as they were, long and short, thick and thin, crooked and straight. You will have to pick and choose, chop and saw, for yourselves."

That, they said cheerfully, was no objection. If they could get the wood in any shape, in any way, they did not care how.

"And we got the osiers, too," cried Colin; "but not at your garden, Lionel. We went there, and they had none."

"No, the ground is too dry up there for growing osiers," Mr Gordon said. "But the gardener directed us to a meadow down by the water-side, where we got all we wished."

"I am afraid it must have cost a good deal," Lionel said, remorsefully.

"Well, it won't quite ruin me," Mr Gordon answered. "I wish you to have the rabbits; and if you have them, you must be able to keep them as comfortable and happy as possible."

"Besides," added Mrs Gordon, "you are getting to be such handy workmen, that we expect that you will save us many a shilling, which, without you, must have gone to the pockets of the carpenter and gardener."

Immediately after dinner the new work was begun in good earnest. In front of the outhouses, between them and the garden, lay a kind of narrow court, across

the bottom of which was to be the rabbit-yard. The court had perhaps been at one time gravelled; at any rate, it had been worn hard by the feet of two or three generations of passers to and fro. And before they could begin to erect their fence, a deep trench must be dug with pickaxes for the reception of the stakes. It was hard work; but Lionel and Malcolm were strong and active, and set about it cheerily and with good will.

The twins were not idle. The carpenter could not send down the branches until Saturday afternoon, and Colin had undertaken that he and Cecil should carry them home for themselves, branch by branch. As the carpenter's shop was farther up the hill than Sunny Brae, so that they had to make the ascent only when empty-handed, and had the easier going down hill when laden, Mr Gordon agreed that they should take this part upon them; and it occupied them nearly all afternoon. The longer branches they bore or dragged between them, the shorter ones they carried separately. In the course of the business Cecil had to bear a good many mortifications, as Colin, in presence of the carpenter and his men, ostentatiously gave him the lighter load, or easier end of the branch, with the remark that he could not carry much. But now that the cloud of depression had been fairly dispelled, Cecil had too much sense to allow such small matters to weigh upon his mind; and indeed he could not but feel the truth of his mother's assertion, that his thoughtfulness and attention were far more helpful to the big boys than was Colin's strength. Colin

cast down his loads anywhere, everywhere, across, along, he did not care, did not think how they were afterwards to be handled. Cecil laid them up in an orderly, convenient fashion, so that the two head workmen could easily select and draw out what best suited them at any moment.

By the time the trench was nearly finished, the wood all nearly carried home, Mr Gordon came out to see how they were getting on. He looked at the ground fenced out, considered, walked to the rubbish corner where were the remains of an old wall, and came back to the boys.

“I am inclined to propose extra work for you,” he said, “if you think you can undertake it.”

They asked what it was.

“I think you might make a kind of pavement or causeway for the floor of your yard. It may be tiresome to do; but it would make the yard drier and more healthy, and would prevent all danger of the rabbits burrowing their way out.”

“Well, I don’t care for the work,” said Lionel, stoutly; “and certainly we should like to see the yard as nice as possible. Should not we, Malcolm?”

Malcolm assented heartily.

“And you know, Lionel,” he added, “we used always to triumph over the Scott boys, because our causewayed yard at Eagle’s Crag was so much drier and nicer than theirs, which was very like this hard ground here.”

“Yes, and ours was so much more easily cleaned, and kept clean,” suggested Agnes; “you might sweep and

sweep until you were tired in their yard, it never kept respectable, however much one did to it."

"But, papa, could we pave our court?" Lionel asked, a little doubtfully.

"In an irregular, rough, but quite sufficient way, I think you could. I was looking at the stones of this old wall, and think you might get enough of flattish ones from among them to do all that is needed."

"But how to fix them?" Lionel asked. "One cannot lay them side by side on the ground; they would not fit, and are not all of the same thickness."

"Certainly not. You must with the pickaxe make a bed for them, and that will be rather tedious as well as hard work, I am afraid."

"Oh, well," they said, "but if the business is well done in the end, we should not mind hard work, or tedious work, to get it done."

"You must have sand too, to sink the stones in, and to fill up the interstices," Mr Gordon observed; "but I think you may get as much as you require from these masons down the hill. As we passed them coming home to-day, I observed that they had a large mound of sand in one corner, more than they can require, I should think."

Agnes undertook to go down and make the request. The masons were very civil, and said the children were welcome to the small quantity for which she asked, if they chose to come and carry it away. So, when the twins had finished the wood-carrying business, they and Agnes, with a wheelbarrow, set about bringing home

the sand. They had now to bring the load up hill, and could only drive up a very little at a time. But as there were three of them to keep each other company, and to make merry over mischances and failures, they got through the task very pleasantly and well. The preliminary digging and trenching were finished this day, and they looked forward to more amusing and pleasant work on the morrow. It was well that the Saturday morning rose bright and fair; for, with such mighty plans on their minds, I don't know how their tempers, or the sunshine of their spirits, might have stood a wet day, which might have kept them in-doors. As no such trial was given them, the five older ones set about the paving immediately after breakfast in great spirits. As usual, the principal and more artistic parts of the work devolved upon the big boys. They arranged, sorted, and fitted, while the twins and Agnes acted as assistants and purveyors to them, brought them stones, sand, tools, or whatever they required. All was harmony and gaiety for a while, until Colin's carelessness brought on grumbling and scolding. He worked with Lionel, who had no patience with him.

"I really wish you would mind what you are about!" Lionel exclaimed, after a more than ordinarily provoking blunder. "Why don't you take example by Cecil, who takes some pains, gives some thought to what he has to do?"

"Take example by him, indeed!" cried Colin, scornfully; "as if Cecil could lift heavy stones or loads of sand as I can do."

"There it is," retorted Lionel, "you never think of anything except of your own boasted strength. Cecil looks to see what kind of hole we have to fill, and brings exactly the right kind of stone, big or little, square or round. You only seek out the biggest stones, because it pleases you to show that you can carry them. You don't care in the least whether they suit or not."

"Well, if I do so ill," cried Colin, throwing away the stone he had raised, "of course you can't want my help. I may as well go and amuse myself. There is no use for my toiling here, if you don't want me."

"Go where you please, do as you like," was Lionel's cool answer.

"Joy go with you and a bottle of moss; if you never come back it'll be no great loss," quoted Malcolm, but quite good-humouredly. He could not resist the joke, but had no intention of seriously vexing Colin.

"No great loss indeed," said Lionel. "The loss of such a careless helper can never be a great loss. The home sunshine, of which mamma speaks, thrives ill when one has to do with heedless, inattentive fellows like Colin, who are always trying one's temper and provoking one."

"And how does it thrive," Agnes asked, indignantly, "with people so impatient as you and Malcolm, people who make such abominably unkind speeches?"

Colin looked triumphant, and was confirmed in his pet by finding that Agnes took his part. Lionel drew himself up in cold, haughty silence, and even Malcolm felt hurt. Agnes ought not, he thought, to have supposed

that he could be in earnest. She ought to have known that he was only in joke. A cloud, grim and gray, had come down upon all. The work went on in cold silence and constraint.

Agnes felt it, and felt that it was partly at least her fault. She had spoken only the truth, but she had spoken it harshly, unkindly ; spoken it as she had no right to do. She was sorry, and wished earnestly that she could unsay what she had said, and what she had done ; but she did not know how best to set about it. If she apologised to Lionel and Malcolm, she might be led to say what she did not think, that they had not been to blame ; or she might come out with something which might increase Colin's anger, and widen the breach among them. And yet they ought not to remain as they were. They were all so uncomfortable, worse than uncomfortable, so wrong. She wished that her mother were among them to put matters right again, or to give her advice how to do it. Mrs Gordon sat working at the open parlour window, whence she could watch the children at work, could be appealed to for counsel and sympathy in all public matters, could hear the sound of their voices, although she could not distinguish all that was said. As Agnes, in her perplexity, looked again and again towards the window, she saw by the frequent pausing of Mrs Gordon's busy fingers, and by her frequent anxious glances towards them, that the sudden silence had been perceived, and had raised anxiety and uneasiness. This made her the more eager to bring peace back among them.

She remembered that on the previous evening, when she and her mother had been talking over the now favourite subject of home sunshine, among other things Mrs Gordon had said—

“ Whenever you see a cloud begin to come down upon the sunshine of the brothers, remember that, as the only girl, it is your part to see to it that it gets no time to settle down, to darken. Set yourself at once, without a moment’s delay, to take up the true sister part of peacemaker, to use every means to disperse the cloud, to bring back the sunlight.”

“ At once, without a moment’s delay,” Agnes repeated to herself, and laying down a basket which she had filled with sand for Malcolm, she turned to the boys.

“ Come,” she said, trying to speak pleasantly and playfully, “ this won’t do. We are all wrong to get into this clouded, uncomfortable way. I was very wrong. Forget what I said, Lionel. Let us all forget everything that has been said or done these last ten minutes. We can’t put back the clock, but let us put back ourselves exactly to where we were ten minutes ago, when everything was pleasant, bright, and cheery.”

Lionel smiled a little, but Colin did not move; and Agnes might not have succeeded in her peacemaking, had it not been for Malcolm’s ready help.

“ Wait a minute before you put us back, Agnes,” he cried in mock haste and anxiety. “ Ten minutes ago, I did not want sand, and I do now. Colin, like a good fellow, do bring me some sand as quick as you can, or Agnes will have us pushed back the ten minutes, and

then I shall have no chance of getting on. Quick, please, quick."

And Agnes, entering into his plan, caught up the basket she had laid down, and thrust it, laughing, into Colin's hand, who, hurried and hustled, brought it to Malcolm, without having time to decide whether to do so would be consistent with his offended dignity.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks. And now, that stone. There's a good fellow. I am ready now for Nesty's most desperate measures." And so, without seeming to do so, he contrived to take Colin for his attendant, and to leave Cecil to the less patient Lionel.

And the sunshine came back, not all at once, but by slow and sure degrees. Colin and Lionel were for a little rather grave and silent; but Agnes and Malcolm exerted themselves so well to begin and carry on jokes, that sullenness could not long withstand them, and by and by it seemed to be as Agnes had wished, that all was forgotten, all was as before.

That it was not quite forgotten she found out pleasantly, when she and Colin were left alone together in the evening walk, and Colin, with much shyness and awkwardness, contrived to tell her that he knew that Lionel was quite right, and that he felt that his inattention and carelessness had often a great deal to do with bringing clouds over the home sunshine.

"I think it has," Agnes said, very kindly. "You see, Colin, it must be provoking when one is very busy to have the wrong thing handed to one, or to be obliged

to rise and seek for one's self what another has promised to get."

"Yes, yes," said Colin, more freely. "I know it is. I have felt it for myself. And I have been thinking of what mamma says, that every one ought to do everything he can to keep up the home sunshine. To be sure I might, to be sure I ought to be willing enough to be a little attentive to do the thing I am going to do, as they want it to be done. To be sure it is a shame to make people uncomfortable, to make things look black and disagreeable, because I do not choose to think of what I am doing."





CHAPTER XI.

CLOUDS AND STORMS.

NELLY, remember you have promised to waken us to-morrow at a quarter before six," Lionel shouted down-stairs as he and Malcolm left the sitting-room to go up to bed on the Sabbath evening.

"What is the reason for this extraordinary activity?" Mrs Gordon asked.

"We have so much to do. We must get on. We can get a little done before prayers," they answered.

"Well," said Mrs Gordon, "you know the time before a quarter past seven is always left to your own disposal. I have no wish to dictate, but I should like to advise you not to meddle with your work until after lessons tomorrow."

"O mamma, why not? What harm can it do?" they asked.

"You know how excessively eager you got about it yesterday, and how entirely it filled your minds. To-day, with its holy duties and pleasant occupations, has made a kind of natural break in upon that excessive

eagerness, has helped you to free your minds from the thoughts and plans which were so entirely occupying them. Is not it a pity to go back to these thoughts and plans, to begin the excitement of the work again, before the lessons and business of the day are comfortably over?"

"But we cannot afford to lose time. We must get on," Lionel said, impatiently.

"I don't ask you to lose time. Get up a quarter before six, if you like. Get up as early as you choose, and get on with the preparation of Tuesday's lessons, so as to get free half an hour or an hour sooner in the forenoon."

Malcolm made a face expressive of disgust.

"To work at our rabbit-yard would be a thousand times more interesting," he said.

"I daresay," she answered, smiling, "but not so prudent. Even to save your time, my plan is the best. Your tools were all put away last night. By the time you have got them out, and settled your different work, there will be little time left to do much. You will find that you have only unsettled your minds for little use."

Preparing lessons seemed so very tiresome in comparison to getting on with their work, that they would not allow themselves to consider the force of her arguments.

"But we have that time to do as we please with," Lionel said, a little petulantly, and they went up-stairs without further discussion.

They did not make up their minds as to what they

should do. They had not, indeed, made them up when they rose the next morning ; but when Lionel put his head out of the window, and saw the wide view lying so beautiful and bright under the morning sun, and felt the morning breeze blow so pleasantly on his face, he could not resist the desire to get out at once to the open air.

“ It would be a shame to spend such a morning in the house,” he cried. “ The sitting-room won’t be ready. We should be obliged to bring our books up into the pigeon-hole. To sit moping over dusty lesson-books in a musty, stuffy, dark hole like that on a morning like this, is not to be thought of.”

And to keep himself from thinking of it, he hurried over his morning dressing, his morning reading, and ran down to the garden, followed by the other four.

As Mrs Gordon had predicted, little progress was made in their work. In seeking out their tools and materials, in admiring what had been done, and settling what to do, the time slipped away, and they had hardly begun to work before the bell summoned them to their father’s study.

But, as Mrs Gordon had further predicted, even this beginning to work unsettled them, and made them eager and restless to get back to it. Never had lessons seemed so difficult, so uninteresting. Never had it seemed so hard to keep their minds from wandering, to make themselves understand what they were about. And even the steady Lionel found visions of breeding-boxes and feeding-troughs come between him and his Greek exercise or mathematical problem.

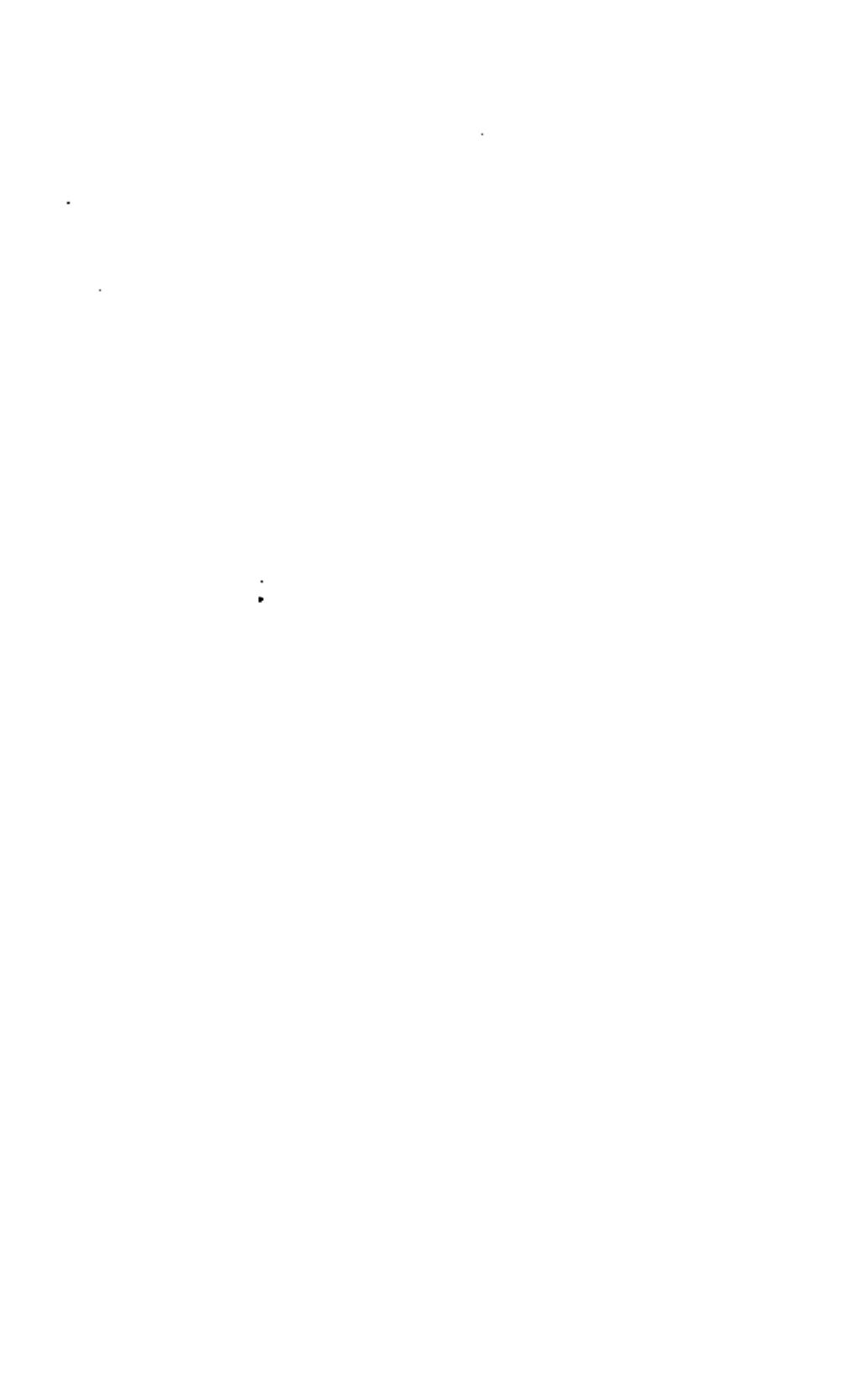
Mrs Gordon had a headache, and it would have been more than usually desirable that she should have had attentive, industrious pupils. The contrary was the case. Wandering, inattentive minds, and restless, fidgety bodies, were what she had to do with that forenoon. And her temper and patience were sorely tried, her spirits completely worn out, by the necessity of constantly repeating orders which were never obeyed, reproofs which seemed quite ineffectual, and explanations which were never understood.

Children do not know how trying it is to a teacher to be obliged perpetually to beg for attention ; how wearisome it is to repeat the same, "Do sit still," "Look on your book," "Don't fidget so," "Mind what you are about," and so on, and so on. They do not understand how discouraging, how depressing it is, to listen to a lesson blundered through, stumbled through, to have to explain the same rule half a dozen times, and to meet with the same look of blank stupidity at the end of the last explanation as before the first. Surely if they could realise the refreshment, the comfort, that there is to their teachers in the diligence and attention of their pupils, they would be more anxious thus to comfort and refresh. To give their minds heartily to what they have to do, to learn their lessons perfectly, to repeat them as carefully and fluently as possible,—these are easy ways of bringing sunshine into the spirits of those who are taking so much pains with them, and are, at the same time, the best means of making the sun shine for themselves also. No lessons are so tiresome, none seem so tedious, sc

difficult, as those which are learned grudgingly, carelessly, inattentively. You idle, dawdling student, lolling back in your chair, grumbling over your lessons, abusing your masters, how do you ever expect to get done in that way? Sit straight to the table, draw your books properly round you, make up your mind that the business has to be got through whether you like it or not, fix your thoughts steadily on the one thing before you, and you will be astonished to find how easy the lesson grows, how quickly it is finished.

No such philosophy came to the aid of poor Mrs Gordon on that Monday morning. Heavily dragged the hours away amid mistakes, blundering, and fretfulness on the part of the taught—reproofs, exhortations, and weariness on the part of the teacher. That inattention and distaste for study which might easily have been subdued at the beginning, grew rapidly by indulgence, until it had settled down into blank stupidity and gloom.

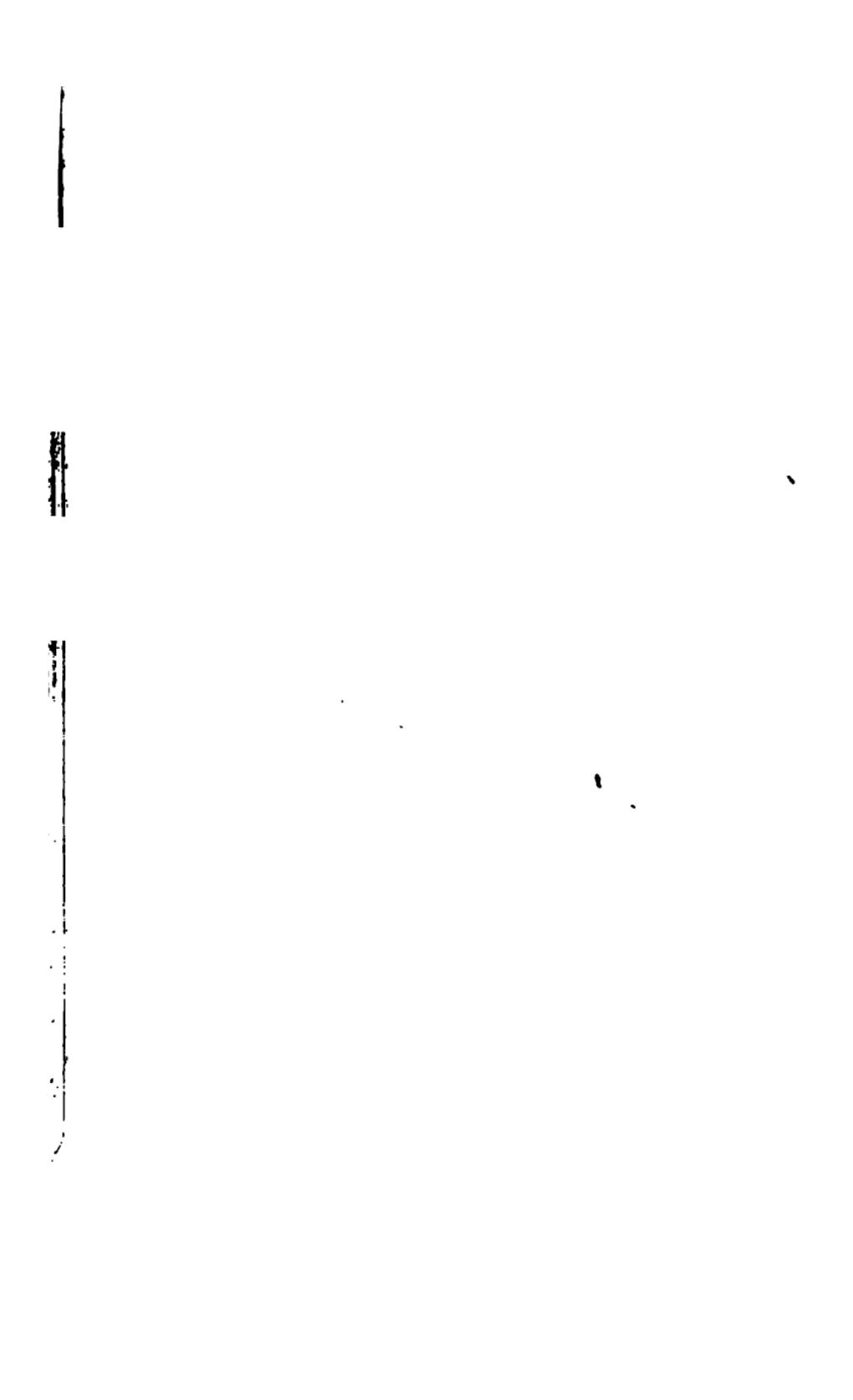
As was generally the case on such occasions, poor Colin suffered more than the rest. His lesson for his father was most imperfectly learned. After giving him back the book two or three times, Mr Gordon desired Cecil to go on by himself, and bade Colin sit down and wait until his brother was done, when he must take the book, and learn the whole lesson from the beginning. Fretting, irritated, Colin sat, looking out of the window at the brightness of the day, longing to be free, and calculating dismally how long it must take him to get his other lessons finished if so much time was given up to the *Latin*.





Mr. Gordon separates Colin and Malcolm.

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Malcolm came in with a message just as Mr Gordon had handed Colin his book ; and Colin's doleful countenance excited the elder brother's love of teasing. As Colin sat near the door, his book carelessly supported on his knee, Malcolm, in passing to go out, twitched it from under his hand, and it fell to the ground. Colin's temper could not at that moment have borne the very slightest provocation. As Malcolm had instantly retreated to the other end of the room, he caught up the book, and flung it at him, and then, irritated to frenzy by Malcolm's mocking laugh at the failure of his aim, he sprang towards him in a perfect fury. Malcolm was on his father's other side. Mr Gordon caught Colin as he tried to pass, and sternly bade Malcolm leave the room on the instant. Sorry and ashamed for the mischief he had done, Malcolm obeyed ; and when he was fairly gone, Mr Gordon tried to bring Colin to his senses again.

But the poor boy had got into one of his storms of passion, when he became like a mad creature, thought of nothing, cared for nothing but his own wild fury. All regard or reverence for his father was for the present forgotten. He struck at him, kicked and struggled as if he had been only one of the other boys. Reasoning and command were equally vain. The only remedy in such cases was to leave him to himself until his reason returned.

Mr Gordon thought of locking him into the bed-room, but there were too many things with which he could get or make mischief, and he thought it best to take him to

the empty room behind the laundry. It had been made into a bath-room for the boys, and contained only the large bath, half full of water, a strong towel-screen, and one plain deal-chair. It did not seem likely that he could either hurt or be hurt by these, and there he was left to recover himself at leisure. In the first instant after the key was turned upon him, he stood still to gather strength and breath ; but in the next, he darted to the door, and assailed it with an unceasing storm of kicks and blows, shouting forth at the same time imperious demands to be let out.

Certainly, if the young people had carefully planned how they might bring discomfort and annoyance upon the whole household, they could not have succeeded better than they had done. Mr Gordon went back to his study agitated, disturbed, reflecting sadly over the evil likely to result from such an ungoverned temper, and totally unable to attend to either writing or reading with such thoughts passing through his mind, with the noise of poor Colin's blows and shouts sounding in his ears. Even the servants in the kitchen were distracted and grieved by those signs that one of their dear children was in trouble and disgrace ; and as the sounds echoed through the house, and up into the sitting-room, they brought fresh gloom and vexation to the already dispirited party there, rendering attention and diligence still more difficult, bringing tears to the eyes of the sympathising Cecil, and making the mother's heart ache as she realised the sinfulness of her boy's present state of feeling, and foresaw the pain and sorrow he would have to bear

when once the fit of passion was over. Colin's warmth of heart, perhaps his pride, always caused him to suffer severely from sorrow and shame after such an outburst; and although his mother could not, as his true friend, wish that sorrow and shame to be less, neither could she help suffering with him.

In the meantime, when Colin had exhausted himself with kicking and screaming, he sat down upon the ground, and, manly as he thought himself, gave way to a most hearty fit of crying. The tears did him good, although they were tears of rage, not of penitence. Gradually he began to come to himself. He had risen, had washed his face in the bath, and was feeling most thoroughly ashamed, when his father unlocked the door, and told him that if he were now a reasonable being, he might come back to the study and finish his lesson. Humbled and submissive, Colin obeyed in silence, took the seat pointed out to him, and set himself in earnest to do what was required of him.

Of course, his fit of passion had not quickened his memory of what he had learned before, nor his power to learn now; and a great part of the forenoon was gone before his lesson was repeated, and he dismissed from the study. Mortified, disconsolate, and miserable, he made his way to the sitting-room to get through as he could the remaining business of the day.

The other children had by that time contrived to stumble through Monday's lessons, and were now with more diligence preparing for the morrow. Mrs Gordon was able to give all her attention to Colin, and with

much kindness and patience tried to get him on as quickly as possible. In spite of all her efforts, the bell rang for dinner, while still a lamentable amount of lessons remained to get done.

A gloomy silent meal was the dinner of that day. Every one looked harassed and dispirited. No one was inclined to converse ; and there was not even the merry chattering of Ned and Blanche to enliven the scene, for they had gone to dine with Mrs Morgan, now fairly settled in her own house.

“ Certainly the family is under a cloud to-day,” remarked Mr Gordon, near the end of the meal. “ Little of your home sunshine to-day, mamma.”

“ Not much, certainly,” she answered, looking round with a smile.

The children did not speak ; only Malcolm glanced penitently at Colin, as if to beg pardon for having added to the cloud which had hung over him.

“ Can we not coax back a little sunshine ?” Mr Gordon continued. “ It seems a pity to be so sombre on such a bright day. Eh, my little Agnes ? What can we do, think you ?”

“ I don’t know, papa ; everything seems to have gone wrong,” she answered, sadly, tears filling her eyes, she hardly knew how.

“ Yes, everything has gone wrong, we must frankly confess that. We have passed a most uncomfortable forenoon. Some of us have been very unpleasant both to ourselves and to others. Perhaps when we remember *how foolish* we have been, we cannot help being a little

longer unpleasant to ourselves ; but I don't see why we should be for a moment longer unpleasant to others."

"But what must we do, then, papa ?" Malcolm asked, smiling a little.

"Forget all about ourselves in the meantime, and each one think how to make his or her neighbour a little more comfortable and cheerful. And I am not sure that we can do that by sitting silent and sad, with drooping heads and drooping spirits."

"But, papa, you don't know how much trouble we have given mamma to-day," Agnes said. "We can't help feeling sad about it."

"Which is the best way of making amends to mamma, Agnes ? To gloom and fret and despond, and make every one unhappy in seeing you so ; or to forget yourself, and try only to cheer the others, to make things once again look bright and pleasant ?"

"Only, you know, papa, when one has done wrong, one ought to feel sorry for it," Lionel objected.

"Certainly ; but we have no right to put our sorrow upon other people's shoulders," he said, smiling. "Because you have depressed mamma's spirits this forenoon by your waywardness and idleness, it seems rather hard that you should depress them this afternoon by gloom and depression. Be as sorrowful, as humble as you like, but don't be disagreeable."

They felt the force of what he said. The three older children especially, looking more closely into their feelings, were forced to confess that in their sorrow there was less of penitence than of a certain gloomy brooding

over, and discontent with, the uncomfortable position into which they had brought themselves. Agnes, glancing at her mother's pale face, felt instantly convinced that it was only common fairness to forget all about her own griefs, of whatever kind, and try to bring back comfort and cheerfulness to that kind mother's wearied spirit. She began, with an effort at first, more easily afterwards, to speak of their plans for the afternoon, and Mr Gordon heartily seconded all her efforts. Faces were beginning to brighten, tones to grow more cheery, by the time the cloth was removed. Only over Colin the cloud still hung black and dense. He seemed to feel himself unworthy to enter into the conversation, unworthy to share in the returning sunshine.

"Now, mamma, you are to go out this very minute, and remain out until tea-time," Mr Gordon pronounced, as they rose from table.

"After poor Colin's lessons are over," she said.

"Before," he returned, positively. "Colin, bring me your books; I will show you what to do yourself."

Colin obeyed. Mr Gordon noted down some sums, and gave him some geographical and historical questions to which to write answers, instead of the lessons he ought to have repeated to his mamma. Colin received the orders in humble submissive silence.

The others had by this time left the room, and Mr Gordon detained Colin for a few minutes, to set before him with affectionate earnestness the sinfulness in God's sight of these fearful fits of passion. It was a favourable moment. Colin was, for the time, completely subdued

and softened, and greatly touched by his father's kindness, where he might have expected severity ; he was ready to listen to, and be impressed by, all he said—ready to yield instant compliance with the affectionately urged advice, that before beginning to study he should shut himself up in his own room, to ask forgiveness from God for his fault, and strength against future temptation. Mr Gordon concluded by saying :—

“ And having done so, my boy, next set yourself to take up cheerfully the burden you have brought upon yourself. You have, by your own fault, spoiled what might have been a very pleasant afternoon ; don't make the matter worse by grumbling or idle wishes. Fretting and complaints are always wrong, but they are inexcusable when the thing complained of has been brought upon us by our own fault or folly.”

Colin followed his father's advice to the very utmost of his power, and got through his tiresome business far better than he had expected, although it was late in the afternoon, not far from tea-time, before he was ready to go out and join the others.

Their hearty, kind welcome was particularly pleasant to him, and he began to feel again almost as happy, if not quite so gay, as usual. The work had been getting on excellently. The stakes were all erected. Agnes and Cecil had begun to weave in the osiers ; while Malcolm and Lionel were busy with the repairs and fitting-up necessary inside the house. Mrs Gordon was with them. A large apple-tree grew in this corner of the garden, close to the hedge. Its branches stretched over into the yard,

and under their shade the boys had built up a comfortable seat for their mother, out of the branches and logs left over after their stakes had been made.

“And we have the best of it, you see, Colin,” said Agnes, when she had pointed out to him the comfort of Mrs Gordon’s seat; “we are close beside mamma, and have nice quiet work, so that we can talk with some comfort. Poor Lionel and Malcolm, in there, with all that hammering and sawing, can neither hear nor speak a word.”

“Can’t we?” said Malcolm, as he came out to seek a piece of wood. “We can hear and speak as many words as we like; only boys know what girls never can learn, that working and talking don’t go well together.”

The boys all laughed.

“Oh, you may laugh,” Agnes said; “I know you boys think that girls can’t do without talking; but I know we can, quite as well as you. Only let us try. Let us see who speaks first. Mamma, you are judge.”

Mrs Gordon smiled, and hummed the old song—

“They made a paction ’tween them twa,
They made it firm and sure, oh;
The first that spake the foremost word,
Should get up and bar the door, oh.”

There was complete silence for a minute or two. Then Agnes, turning to seek a fresh osier, saw her father coming out to them, and exclaimed—

“Why, there is papa again! This is the”—

Shouts of laughter and triumph from the four boys

drowned her voice. She looked vexed, and tried to defend herself.

"It was because I happened to be the first to see papa," she urged. "If it had been one of you, you must have spoken just as I did."

"Oh, of course," they cried; "girls are never without good excuses for talking."

Agnes would have argued the question further, but Mrs Gordon checked her gently.

"Is it worth while saying more about it?" she asked, in a tone so low that only Agnes heard. "Is it worth the risk of bringing clouds down upon us again, when things are beginning to look bright?"

Agnes swallowed down the little feeling of irritation, and tried to change the subject.

"How are we so highly favoured, papa?" she asked, as Mr Gordon came up to them; this is at least the fourth time that you have come out to see us."

"I was anxious to know if that poor little object were free yet," he answered, nodding and smiling to Colin.

Colin looked up gratefully.

"Papa and mamma care so much about my being comfortable and happy," he thought, "and I never care how much trouble or annoyance I give them."

Mr Gordon was consulted about several momentous questions regarding the in-door accommodation for the rabbits, and gave cordial praise to the workmanlike way in which they were doing everything.

"You are getting on famously," he said; "and I think the sunshine has broken through the clouds again."

“Indeed it has,” Mrs Gordon said, “and very pleasant and cheerful it is.”

“Mamma, that was such a good thought of yours about home sunshine,” Agnes observed; “it helps one so often to keep from little wrong things, and to do little right ones—things you know, mamma, of which we never used to think.”

“It is so pleasant and so pretty too,” added Cecil.

“And so true,” said Mr Gordon; “kindness, forbearance, and consideration among the members of a family, are more like sunshine than like anything else to which we can compare them.”

“It was not a thought of my own, however,” Mrs Gordon said; “I got it from an old lady with whom I used to spend many happy months when I was a girl. I remember another thought of hers upon the same subject, which is also pleasant, pretty, and true. She used to say, ‘Remember, my dear, to plant as many flowers and as few thorns as possible in the daily path of all who come near you.’”

“I know whom you speak of now,” said Mr Gordon; “I have heard her say that; and also, ‘If it comes in your way to bring a flower to any one, let it be as perfect as you can make it. Never bring a withered leaf if you can help it.’”

“What did she mean?” Cecil asked, looking puzzled.

“Try to find out,” answered his father.

“I think I know only too well,” Agnes said, laughing. “It was all very well to run into the house to seek a pin for mamma’s shawl, but it would have been better if I

had taken the trouble to seek for a straight one instead of bringing one so crooked that it was not of the least use."

"Oh, I see," said Colin; "it suits me too well also. It was well enough to offer to hold Malcolm's plank steady while he was sawing, but it would have been better if I had minded what I was doing, and not allowed it to slip at the last moment."

"Yes," said Lionel, drily; "and when so anxious to save mamma the trouble of going to speak to Nelly, it might have been as well to have taken pains to understand the message rightly, instead of carrying quite a wrong one."

"Was that meant for a flower or a thorn, Lionel?" Mr Gordon asked, gravely.

Lionel coloured, but, looking up, answered ingenuously—

"It was a thorn, papa. But I don't think I quite meant it to be one. I didn't think."

"I believe so, my boy. But don't you know that in family life more thorns are planted through carelessness than through malice?"

"I am sure," said Malcolm, with much feeling, "the thorn I planted for poor Col to-day was not meant in malice. But it turned out a terribly sharp one. I have not told you, Colin, how sorry I am."

Colin eagerly took the offered hand, saying that it was all his own fault, that Malcolm was always the best fellow in the world, that he never meant to trouble any one.

"It was very bad," Malcolm said. "I only wonder,

papa, how you and mamma have spoken so kindly to me. I am sure I deserved to be in disgrace."

"I had a pretty good notion that Colin's imprisonment was as painful to you as to him," Mr Gordon said, smiling kindly. "But, Malcolm, my boy, I do wish that you would think more seriously of that same thorn-planting of yours. It is a serious fault."

Malcolm did not speak. But he met his father's eye with a serious, sorrowful look, that was better than words. The others were recalling and enumerating various cases illustrative of the flower and thorn idea.

"I remember," said Mrs Gordon, "a very characteristic instance of my old lady's care to make her gift-flowers perfect. She wished to send a story-book to a grand-nephew, to console him for having been disappointed of a holiday excursion. I was paying her a visit at the time, and as she had fixed what the book was to be, and was very busy about other matters, I offered to procure it for her. But she preferred to go herself to the shop, that she might choose the style and colour of binding most likely to please the little boy. He was very young, and therefore more apt to attach importance to such matters.

"When the book came home, I undertook to put it up, and had got an old newspaper for the purpose. But that would not do. She remembered, she said, that when she was a young thing she had always thought those parcels the most attractive and interesting-looking which were done up in regular shop-like brown paper. Besides, she wished to print the address in large letters, so that he

could read it for himself, and the cross lines of the newspaper might interfere with its distinctness. So up-stairs she trudged to her store-room, to get exactly the right kind of paper.

“As I was tying the string, she said she feared it was too short. ‘Oh no,’ I said, and knotting it into a tight double knot, I triumphantly snipped a little morsel off one end to show that I had been right. My old friend said no more. But some minutes after, when I had gone to see if the servant was ready to take the parcel, I heard her go again up to her store-closet. And when I returned to the sitting-room, I found her untying my parcel.

“‘Was it not right?’ I asked.

“‘All right except the string. You see I wish him to have the pleasure of unfastening it for himself, and his impatient little fingers could never manage your firm, business-like knot. So I have tied it in a loose slipping one with two ends, which he can pull out in a minute.’”

“Well, it was very good of her,” said Agnes.

“Papa, don’t you think Mr Campbell of Ferncairn is one who tries to make his gift-flowers perfect?” Lionel asked.

“Indeed he is. And he not only tries, but he has that delicacy and refinement of feeling which enables him always to succeed.”

“But, by the by, that puts me in mind, where is Beardie all this time?” Agnes asked, looking up as if she had suddenly made a great discovery.

"Where, indeed? Perhaps in the moon," one of the boys suggested.

"But really you know she was to have been here on Saturday. I wonder why she did not come."

"Because the lad who was to have brought her has been detained at home by the severe illness of his mother, and Campbell had no one else whom he cared to trust with her. She will come to-night or to-morrow, I believe."

"Did you hear from Mr Campbell?" they asked.

"No; but from John Campbell."

"And did he say when he was coming to see you, papa?"

"Yes; or at least he left it to me to fix a day. He said that he was ready whenever I chose."

"And what day did you choose?"

"I told him that there was no necessity for his coming before Thursday, when he must be in to the market at any rate."

"What do you think of his friend's case?" Mrs Gordon asked.

"As far as I can judge, there is a good deal in it. I have sent the papers to our agent, and asked him to give an opinion. It would be useless for Campbell to go to Edinburgh before he gets that."

The children began to calculate the chances of getting their work so far on before Thursday as to be able to fix with Campbell when the rabbits might come home.

"And, papa, are you willing that we boys should go to fetch them?" Lionel asked.

“What does mamma say?” he answered.

“I should like them to have the pleasure. I am only a little afraid that it is too soon to go back to Eagle’s Crag. I am afraid that to see all the dear old places again so soon may be too great a trial—may make them a little discontented with this home.”

“Oh, we are willing to run the risk,” Lionel said, confidently.

“But have you any right to run the risk?” Mr Gordon asked. “Remember our cheerfulness and sunshine of spirit are never given us for our own pleasure alone, but that we may be strong and ready to work God’s work, and to help others. No man can confine his gloom or discontent to himself alone. Others must suffer with him, whether he means that they should or not.”

“To be sure,” Lionel admitted. “It would never do for us to come back moping and dull, and to spoil all your enjoyment with our gloomy faces.”

“But that would not be the way, I am sure,” Malcolm urged. “Of course we must feel some sorrow when we see our dear old Eagle’s Crag again; but we shall be so glad to bring home the rabbits, and all that, that I am sure we can’t come back dull or moping.”

“What does mamma say?” again asked Mr Gordon.

“I am inclined to agree with Malcolm, now that I think more of it. The pleasure of seeing old friends, and of getting their old favourites, will, I believe, prevent the pain of seeing home again from becoming excessive. They may be sobered by the visit, and made

a little more grave and thoughtful. But there would be no great harm in that."

"No," Mr Gordon answered, smiling ; "young people, more particularly boys, are seldom the worse of anything which makes them think and feel."

"We may go then," cried Lionel and Malcolm.

"And we too, papa ? Cecil and I too ?" urged Colin.

"Oh, for that I cannot say ; mamma must decide that question ; it is quite beyond me," he said, as he turned to go away.

"Beyond you or not, you must see to it," Mrs Gordon cried, laughing and rising from her seat. "There is Bell looking out at the laundry door as a gentle reminder to me that it is tea-time. And, at any rate, I don't mean to take all the concerns of the family off your shoulders. You must settle this matter for yourself."

"But how am I to settle it ?"

"Poor papa, see how he resigns himself to his fate," laughed Agnes.

"But, mamma," he called after her, "tell me what I am to say. Are you willing to trust these two little geese away from your own care for a whole day ?"

"Well, if they take care of Cecil, I suppose there is no objection," she said, after a moment's thought.

"Well, if they take care of Cecil, I suppose there is no objection," Mr Gordon repeated, like a schoolboy repeating his lessons.

They all laughed, and the twins overwhelmed him with thanks.

"Yes," he said, gravely, "I deserve them, considering

how boldly I opposed, and in how masterly a manner I overcame mamma's opposition. But remember, you two old fellows, Cecil is under your care. You are responsible for his safety. And you must take the coach both going and coming. Cecil can't walk either way."

"Oh, but it is so much pleasanter to walk," grumbled Colin, "it is such a bore to go by the coach."

"You can stay at home then," said his father, coolly.

Cecil began to fear it might be right to give up the pleasure of going, as his company seemed to be a restraint upon them all. But Lionel made everything pleasant by offering to go with Cecil alone on the coach, and so allow Malcolm and Colin to walk. And so it was settled, and by working with double diligence, the house and yard were so far advanced by Thursday, that they could fix to go to Ferncairn on Saturday if the weather permitted.





CHAPTER XII.

SYMPATHY THE BEST SUNSHINE.

E weather was tolerably kind to them. Saturday, though not brilliant, was fair, cool, and pleasant. The two walkers took an early breakfast, and started immediately after prayers ; Cecil and Lionel about an hour later by the coach. Agnes went up to the inn with these two last, saw them off, and came back feeling utterly disconsolate and dispirited. What was she to do the whole day without the boys ? and that day a Saturday too, when there were no lessons to occupy her, or help to make the time pass !

“ Have you no little work, or business of your own, which it might be well to get done, now that you have some time to yourself ? ” Mrs Gordon suggested, when she heard her thus dolefully bemoaning her desolate state.

“ I never have any work or business except with the boys,” Agnes answered, a little indignantly ; “ I am sure I never want to have time to myself. I don’t care the least to do anything without them.”

"Well, my dear," Mrs Gordon said, smiling, "when one gets into such an utterly desolate condition as yours, where one feels that it is idle to expect the least glimpse of pleasure, I think the best way is to resign one's self to one's fate, and at once to give up trying to enjoy one's self."

"O mamma, I did not mean to be quite so doleful, to make quite such a piteous moan as that," she said, laughing in spite of herself. "Only, you know, when I am accustomed to be always with the boys, it is impossible to find pleasure in doing anything without them."

"Exactly so ; and as it would be a pity to waste time in seeking what it is impossible to get, suppose you for this day give up all hope of being happy, and only try to be useful. Set aside your own pleasure or enjoyment, as being quite unattainable for the present, and see what you can do for the pleasure or enjoyment of some one else."

Agnes had a shrewd guess that her mother was still laughing at her ; but yet the suggestion pleased her, and she determined to follow it. A variety of efforts for the pleasure of others at once presented themselves for her choice. The big boys had found time the previous afternoon to dig up the ground for their mother's flower-borders round the washing-green. Agnes knew that it would give them pleasure to find them all nicely raked and dressed, and ready for any plants they might bring home from Ferncairn. But to go out alone to the garden, where she was so accustomed to have them with

her, to work at works in which they had always before taken their share, seemed too severe a trial. She believed that it would be wiser and safer to find some occupation which she could carry on in the parlour beside her mother. True, Mrs Gordon meant to be very busy writing letters for the Indian mail. But still it would be a comfort to be beside her, to see her, even if she might not speak. A new frock might be made for Blanche's doll. Or—yes, that was the very thing—this was the very time for carrying out a long-cherished prospect of delighting Mary's heart with the present of a beautiful basket, like Sophia Mildmay's, for holding her thimble, scissors, needles, pins, and reels of cotton. Agnes's face brightened, and she ran to seek out and gather together her materials.

Before leaving Eagle's Crag, Mrs Gordon, in turning over some old stores, had found for Agnes a treasure of coloured and gilt paper, bright ribbons, and corners of silk. Out of these the basket was to be made; and they were brought out, and spread on the table for inspection and choice.

Agnes was too much of a boy-girl to be very neat-handed about such works, and Mrs Gordon looked up from her writing to advise that a plain, square box, or something in that easy style, should be attempted first, until she was at leisure to give a little advice and assistance. But Sophia Mildmay's eight-sided basket had taken possession of Agnes's fancy, and she could not descend to anything so commonplace and easy as a square box.

She chose her colours to her great contentment, and began the business with courage and confidence. The eight-sided pieces were to be made of pasteboard, covered with a pretty, bright cinnamon-coloured paper, and bound with pink ribbon. The binding and sewing together would be easy enough when their turn came. The real difficulty lay in cutting all the pieces exactly the right size to fit in to each other. Yes, and in cutting even the paper pattern for the first one,—how was that to be done? Agnes had never considered the matter before. It seemed so easy to say that all the eight sides must be exactly equal, that she had not thought that the making them so might prove more difficult. With Lionel's mathematical ruler, she measured off one side, and drew another sloping away from it in the right direction as she fancied, and of exactly the right length, as she took pains to make it. And for one or two sides this did well enough; but when it came to the eighth meeting the first, the real trouble of the matter showed itself. She measured, and ruled, and altered the angles of her lines again and again. In vain. She never could get the eight sides to meet as they ought and must. She was in despair. How was she ever to find out at what angle the sides ought to slope away from each other, or even, if she knew that, how was she to make all the angles alike? Suddenly a bright thought struck her. She recollect ed that the top and bottom of an eight-sided figure lay straight along, as she called it, the two middle side-pieces straight down. She cut out a square, which was easily enough done, and then snipping off the

corners, her eight-sided figure was attained. True, but there was still the difficulty of knowing exactly how much, or at what angle to cut off the corners, so that the sloping and straight sides should be exactly equal. She folded her paper, and snipped and measured, and snipped again, until the original square was all snipped away, and still the pattern was as unattainable as ever.

A piteous sigh made Mrs Gordon look up, and ask its cause.

“I don’t know so well about eight-sided figures,” she said, when the difficulty was explained to her; “but if you can be content with a six-sided one, I can help you to draw it.”

Agnes’s courage and pride had fallen many degrees in the course of her vain efforts. Now she could even have been content to have adopted the much-despised square box, and welcomed assistance to make a six-sided basket with pleasure.

Mrs Gordon directed her to draw a circle about the size she wished the pieces to be. With Lionel’s compasses this was easily done.

“Now,” said Mrs Gordon, “the radius of the circle is the right length for each side; and by cutting off parts of the circle all round equal in length to the radius, you will find that you have got an exact six-sided figure.”

Agnes did as she was directed, and succeeded this time without the least difficulty. Having cut off one side, the next could slope only in one direction, if it was to end at the circumference of the circle; and so the

troublesome angles found out themselves, as she expressed it.

This grand difficulty over, she got all her sides and the bottom cut out, and by dint of a little clipping and paring had made them all fit, and was proceeding to cover them with the cinnamon-coloured paper, preparatory to the pleasant and easy binding and sewing together, when Mary and the three little ones came home from their walk. Willie was not very well, and had fallen asleep, and Mary had been glad to bring him in, as she had some Saturday cleaning on her mind to get done.

Mrs Gordon looked a good deal annoyed when she heard the voices and steps of the little ones upon the stairs. Her letters were not finished, and she could not leave them; and yet it seemed hard to keep poor Blanche and Ned in their small nursery, while Willie slept, and Mary scrubbed and dusted.

Agnes understood the trouble, and knew she could remedy it, could take the little ones out to the garden; but at that moment, when her work was beginning to be prosperous and pleasant, she could not resolve to leave it, and she worked on more busily than ever to keep herself from thinking that she ought to go. It would not do. She could not help hearing every now and then little outbursts of impatience and complaint from the nursery, earnest entreaties from Mary that they would not waken Willie; she could not help seeing that at every such sound her mother raised her head, and looked troubled. Once, twice, thrice had it happened;

and at each time her conscience had told her how easily she could help them all, how much she was bound to do for her mother, who did so much for her ; but the beautiful basket danced before her eyes, and it seemed impossible to leave it.

How the matter might have ended I do not know, had it not happened that, in looking up at one time, a sudden gleam of light upon the distant hills caught her eye, and recalled all that had been said about home sunshine. Instantly her mind was made up. She rose without another thought, and began to gather together her paper, ribbon, and other treasures.

“Don’t bother yourself, mamma,” she said, as Mrs Gordon glanced wistfully down the unwritten page of her letter, when a whimper from Blanche came to her ear. “I’ll look after them. I’ll take them out to play in the garden. Won’t that be the best way?”

“Indeed, my dear, I am very much obliged to you,” Mrs Gordon said, heartily. “I can hardly tell you what a relief it will be to me. Only I am sorry that you should leave your work unfinished. It is so seldom that you get time for such things.”

“Oh, never mind. I’ll manage to finish it some time, somehow,” Agnes cried, now quite cheerful. “I can always scrape together at least ten minutes or so in the evening, after we come home from our walk.”

And having tidily gathered her parings and snippings into a heap, and laid away her goods, she ran off to the nursery quite gay and satisfied.

She had said to herself that her mother’s hearty thanks

were a most ample reward for the little sacrifice she had made. But when she opened the nursery door, and saw Blanche sitting pouting on the floor, spurning with her foot the doll with which Mary was coaxing her back to happiness ; and Ned standing looking out of the window with a kind of resolute, wistful patience ; when she saw the instant brightening of the little faces, the eager spring towards her as she announced her intention of taking them out to the garden, and felt the close pressure of Ned's little arms round her neck in a suffocating embrace of thanks, she became ashamed to call her small act of duty a sacrifice. Surely it was a pleasure to be able to please such dear children.

She took them to the garden. She had planned to take an immense deal of trouble in amusing them, and had thought of several diverting games to teach them, several pretty stories to tell. But she soon found that nothing more was required of her than to listen to the story of their walk, and of the wonderful dog which had chosen to attend them.

“And it went all the way to— to— to—,” said Ned, too eager to be able to find the name.

“To the toll,” interposed Blanche. “All the way to the toll, Nestie, and round by the low bridge.”

“And he carried my basket in his mouth, and he put his big paws on my shoulders, and kissed my face.”

“And my face too. He kissed my face too,” again jealously broke in Blanche, pulling Agnes by the sleeve to make her look round to hear her part of the adventure.

And so they went on with an endless story, while

Agnes had nothing to do, except to put in questions and exclamations at proper places, and to keep them from knocking their heads against the branches of trees, or stumbling over the boxwood in their excessive eagerness.

“To be sure one can best make children happy by listening to their wonderful tales, or allowing them to teach you their wonderful games,” she wisely observed to her mother as they were setting out for their afternoon walk. “It is always best to follow their lead, and let them make themselves happy as they choose.”

“I am glad, my dear, that you have found that out,” Mrs Gordon said; “I so often see older brothers and sisters fail to please the little ones, because they are too anxious to take their own way of doing so. Having formed some exceedingly clever device with which they are sure the children must, or at least ought to be delighted, they cannot consent to give it up, even when it happens, as it so often does, that the little minds are too full of a device of their own, to understand or care for any other.”

“Their devices are often so very absurd and trifling,” Agnes observed, laughing, “that we wise elders can’t understand how they can find the least amusement in them.”

“They like them, and are amused and pleased by them, because they are their own; and so long as their minds are bent upon them, the cleverest and most amusing game in the world would fail to please.”

“It is not only for children that it holds true,

mamma," Agnes said. "At least," laughing, "if you count me anything more than a child. To-day, if you had given a whole half hour or an hour to help me to make the square box you recommended, I should not have been half so grateful as I was for your giving only five minutes to show me how to make the six-sided basket upon which I was so intent."

"You see that sympathy is often the best sunshine."

"Indeed it is. I know, that when you looked up so often to pity me in my failures, even when you were so busy with that long letter to Uncle Malcolm, you did me more good than you can think; more good, I am sure, mamma, than if you had been able to give all your time to help me."

They had reached the house of an old woman whom they were going to visit. Mrs Gordon had got quite intimate with her, and had seen her often. But this was Agnes's first introduction. She was an old Highland body, living quite alone in one small room up a dark stair, her one window looking out into a narrow, dirty street. She was so perfectly deaf, that it was impossible to converse with her except by signs or writing. But she was a hale, cheery little woman, more than eighty years old, yet with bright black eyes and rosy cheeks, her hair not more than a dark iron-gray, smoothed back under one of those old-fashioned caps we seldom see now, the one plain border of the same material as the cap, and with almost no fulness in it, and the broad black ribbon bound round the crown. As she could hear no questions, she had got into the habit of pouring

forth in an unbroken stream all the information about herself that she thought could interest her hearers. And to Agnes's great amusement, she began the moment they were seated, in a high singing Highland tone, without a moment's pause, with scarcely a stop to take breath.

"I'm more than eighty years old, and I've been twenty years a widow, ay, ay, an' I've a son that's very kind to me, an' I've a dochter that's very kind to me, an' I've five bairns in the kirkyard, an' him in the midst o' them, ay, ay, ohone, ohone! an' I lived wi' him for twa an' thretty years, an' he's in the kirkyard, ay, ay, ohone, ohone! an' my dochter has bonnie bairns that are ra'al kind to me; an' I'm no ill off; an' I can read my Bible yet without the glasses; an' a gude leddy gave me this fine big Bible when I was married sixty an' twa years gin Martinmas; an' there's his name in it, an' our bairns'; an' he's been in the kirkyard thae thretty years, ay, ay; an' a kind gentleman gied me a hail pund o' tea only yesterday; an' I want for naething, oh no, oh no. The Lord sees that I want for naething."

In spite of the pathos of much of what she said, her singing tones, the curious mixture of subjects, and the little bright, rosy, and yet old face, all amused Agnes so much, that she could hardly keep from smiling, and wondered to see how her mamma was able to listen with all attention and sympathy to what she must have heard several times before. To listen and look kind, interested, and compassionate, was all that Mrs Gordon could do, for the old body's stream of talk was too incessant to admit of such a slow process as seeking the slate, and

writing answers or remarks upon it. Mrs Gordon attempted nothing of the kind, but only listened, and by her looks and gestures encouraged the old woman to go on until she had said all she wished to say, when, with a hearty shake of the hand, she bade her good-bye, and they went away.

“I don’t think we have done much good by that visit,” Agnes remarked, decidedly.

“Indeed, my dear! what good did you expect to do? I did all I meant, or hoped for,” Mrs Gordon answered.

“But what, mamma?”

“I hope I cheered and comforted the old body by making her feel I was interested in all her joys and sorrows.”

“Oh,” Agnes said, thoughtfully, as if a new light were breaking in upon her.

“Imagine yourself in her place,” Mrs Gordon continued. “Imagine yourself, old and lonely, living in that dull little room, with no one to speak to, your mind full of the days when you had a bright little cottage of your own upon the sunny hill-side, merry, noisy children playing round you, and a good, loving husband to work and care for you and them: would it not be a great relief, a great comfort, to be able to tell about those days to some one who would be interested in them—to be able to speak of the many you had lost, and of the goodness of those who were left to you?”

“I see it now, mamma. I did not think of it before. Somehow I fancied that rich people visited the poor only

to take them money, or food, or clothes, or to give them good advice, or to find them work."

"Of course there are poor families to whom it is very pleasant to take food, clothes, or money, when we have them to take, and now and then a little advice may be given and taken with good effect. But in the majority of cases that I have to do with, I find that the best thing I can do for my poorer friends is to make them realise that I understand and feel for them in their joys and sorrows, their worries and pleasures—the best gift I can take to them is that strengthening and comforting, that softening and cheering, that comes to the heart from the cordial, true sympathy of a friend."

"To be sure," Agnes said, "you often paid visits to our Eagle's Crag friends without giving them anything."

"In nine cases out of ten, I might say in nineteen out of twenty, I went merely to ask of their welfare, to hear what they were doing, and to give them the pleasure of telling me all the particulars of their home life since my previous visit. And so it is here. The woman we are now going to visit is one whose character is as far above my counsel, as her sorrow is beyond my help."

They had reached the house, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a grave, sad-looking woman, apparently between thirty and forty. Her face lighted up with a sober expression of pleasure and welcome when she saw them, and she invited them to come in. They found no one in the room except a baby asleep in the cradle. While the mother hastened to dust the two

already spotlessly clean chairs, Mrs Gordon bent over the cradle.

"I am sorry that baby is asleep," she said ; "I have brought my little girl, who has a perfect passion for babies, and she would have liked dearly to get him to nurse. Look, Agnes, is not he a handsome fellow?"

"He is a braw, sonsy chiel," the mother said, intensely gratified, and gently turning down the coverlid, that Agnes might see his fat little neck, and round, mottled arms, "and that wise and noticin', ye wad maist think he kens every word that's said. If I say, Whawr's Johnnie? he points to the pin where his slate hangs, an' to the door, an' shakes his bit wise head, as if he wad say that Johnnie's awa to the schule. An' if I say, Is that Lizzie comin' hame? he'll kick wi' his feet, and brizz himsel' forward against my arms, to get me to take him to the door."

"And the other children are very fond of him, are they not?" Mrs Gordon asked.

"Oh deed, ma'am, they jist mak him the king o' the hous. Lizzie is fair daft about him, an' wad never let him out o' her arms wi' her will. And Johnnie, for all he is so fond of his book, wad leave it at ony time to serve Tom, or to play wi' him ; and even the wee bodies will let him touzle their hair an' scart their faces without a word, an' are as proud as peacocks to get him on their laps."

"It is as good for them as it is pleasant for him," Mrs Gordon observed.

"Deed it is, ma'am, an' they ken that. They a' ken

that it's mair a happiness than a duty to love ane anither—I'm thankful to say they a' ken that."

Mrs Gordon asked about the progress of the elder children at school, examined and admired Johnnie's copy-book, which the mother so proudly displayed, and entered heartily into all her little plans for getting the younger children taught either at home or at school, and into all her satisfaction at their dutifulness and diligence. A few earnest words were said by both visitor and visited, about that Saviour who was the joy and strength of both hearts ; and so the visit passed.

"What is the sorrow which you said was beyond your help, mamma ?" Agnes asked, after they had left the house.

"She has a bad husband ; and to one of her strong feelings and principles, that is a sorrow of unimaginable bitterness."

"She did not speak of it."

"No, my dear, it is a sorrow too deep to be spoken of, except to her God ; it lies a silent load upon her heart. I heard about her from our good minister, who told me her story. But even to him she never breathes a syllable of complaint. She has by nature, I suspect, a very high, proud temper, which makes it exceedingly difficult for her to bear with her husband as she knows a child of God ought ; and with this constant strife and constant weight pressing her spirit to the dust, I am sure it is a comfort to be able to tell her smaller trials and little vexations, to speak of her good children, to describe her plans and purposes to one who is heartily

interested in them, and so I go very often to see her."

Their next and last visit was very different from the others ; it was to a woman in pretty prosperous circumstances, whose good, steady husband brought to her every farthing of his wages, and whose children were almost ready to relieve their parents of the charge of their maintenance ; but she was one on whom prosperity seemed a little wasted. Not that she could not enjoy it, for she was a hearty, cheery woman ; but she could by no means make the most of it. Careless, thoughtless, and slovenly, she stumbled through life somehow, anyhow, and had less of comfort in her home than many a one who had not a quarter of her means.

They found that they had not timed their visit well ; she was in the midst of her sloppy, ineffectual Saturday cleaning. And although a good-tempered woman in the main, she was liable to fearful bursts of passion, one of which she was pouring forth when they went in. She softened her tone a little at sight of Mrs Gordon, and tried to find her a tolerably clean and dry chair. Mrs Gordon did not sit down, but she stood for a few minutes listening to the angry woman's complaint, and contriving, by pleasant, soothing remarks, to draw her thoughts away from the cause of her passion, and to restore her to something like calmness. This done, she left her with a promise to return some day very soon.

" You might have done a little good there, mamma," Agnes said. " Surely that woman requires advice both about her temper and her untidiness."

"Perhaps so ; but there were three good reasons for not attempting to give her such advice just now. First, she was in a passion ; secondly, you were present ; and thirdly and principally, because I know of nothing about me or in me which can authorise me to go into a woman's house, and lecture and reprove her as I might one of you, my own children."

"Well, mamma, I know, in all the books where we read of ladies visiting the poor, and going about doing good, they always tell people of their faults, and exhort them to give them up."

"They may do something by such measures, but whether it is good or not is a different question. I was able to soothe that poor, passionate woman, by showing her that I really felt for her in the vexations which had come upon her ; and I am visiting her pretty often, in the hope of getting her to look upon me as a friend, and to confide in me. If, as I hope, she opens out to me, and tells me of her difficulties and discomforts, I think I may be able to lead her gently to see that her own slovenly careless ways are partly the cause of them. And I even look forward to being able in time to make her understand the evils and sinfulness of her temper ; but that must be done very gently, very kindly. And as to going into her house, and telling her that she ought not to get into a passion, that she ought to be ashamed of herself, or any other of these strong modes of expression or of reproof, I cannot see that I have the least right to use them to a comparative stranger, to one who has never asked my advice. I

should as soon, nay, a great deal sooner, go to Lady Scott, and reprove and admonish her on the impropriety of spending too much money, or of quarrelling with her brother."

"But about religion, mamma," Agnes asked, thoughtfully. "Surely when we meet people who do not care about God, we should try to make them care?"

"Can we make them care?" Mrs Gordon answered, with earnest feeling. "But, my dear, so far you are right. If we believe that our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has died for us to save us from eternal death, has borne our punishment in our stead, and has shed His precious blood to wash out our sins; we must desire that every one with whom we have to do, high or low, rich or poor, should know Him and His wondrous love, and should serve and glorify Him. And we shall spare no pains to do what we can to instruct those who know Him not, and to quicken those who do, to greater love and earnestness in His cause. But even this anxiety for their best interests can by no means authorise us to intrude rudely and roughly into their homes, or into their thoughts; to demand that they should open up to us their most secret and deepest feelings; to insist that they should answer any hard home-thrusting question which we may choose to ask, and should either condemn themselves as godless, careless sinners, or reveal to our hard-judging eyes the secret hopes which they are only as yet tremblingly cherishing. All such intrusion is not more unwarrantable than useless. No one was ever yet driven or scolded into religion."

"Is there not anything we can do for them?" Agnes asked again, a little sadly.

"To be sure there is much we can do. Without interfering with their thoughts and feelings, we can let them see what our adorable Lord has been to us, we can refer everything to His will, can show how entirely we realise that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. And while sparing no pains to gain their confidence, to make them feel that we are truly interested in them, we can pray, and watch, and wait, and be ready to seize the very first opening which God gives us to bring the matter more home to their consciences and hearts. And when such opening comes, we can use it gently, tenderly, lovingly; being more exceedingly anxious in this, than in any other thing, to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us; more exceedingly afraid of wounding or grieving a wounded conscience or a heavy heart."

"To be sure that must be the best, but it is not the easiest way," Agnes observed.

"No; it is much the most difficult way. It requires us to take a great deal of trouble to gain their confidence and to understand their characters. We may be obliged to pay them twenty visits before we can gain the opening we long for. While, on the other system, we can march in the very first time like a policeman, and require that they should instantly acknowledge our authority as judge—our right to dictate and order them about."

As their visits were now over, Agnes begged her

mother to go to the Knock, from whence they could watch for the coach by which the boys were to return home. Mrs Gordon readily consented, and Agnes led her to a broad flat stone on the face of the hill under the wood.

“There, mamma,” she cried, “we can see the road beyond the toll. Let us sit here, and watch until the coach comes into sight.”

Mrs Gordon was willing enough to sit down and watch after a little. But she said that now it was quite too soon, and proposed that they should take a walk through the woods first.

Agnes demurred. It would be too provoking, she said, to miss the boys. The coach might pass that spot while they were away, and then they could not see it so well again until it was near the town.

Mrs Gordon laughed at her fears.

“The coach is not due for two hours yet, my dear,” she said. “It is too much to expect that I should sit upon this cold hard stone for two hours watching for a coach, which cannot come before its time.”

Agnes saw the unreasonableness of her proposal, and yielded; and they spent some time very comfortably wandering through the wood, and finding many nice plants of wood sorrel, wood anemone, and wild violets, together with young suckers of honeysuckle and sweet-brier, which they could get for their borders when they were ready for them. At the end of an hour and a half, however, Agnes grew impatient again; and as an appeal to Mrs Gordon’s watch failed to convince her that they

were still too soon, her mother good-naturedly gave way to her, and they took up their position on the stone of observation. Agnes placed herself so as to keep the important spot constantly in sight, and not the most interesting subjects of conversation could draw her thoughts or her eyes from it for more than half a minute at a time. At last, in the midst of a most animated description of a den among the hills where some particularly fine primroses were to be found, a sudden cloud of dust arose on the road, and out of it struggled into sight the heavy coach with its passengers and luggage. Agnes sprang instantly to her feet, and hastened towards the lane leading to the inn.

“There it is, mamma!” she cried. “Come, let us get to the inn before they come up.”

Mrs Gordon rose more leisurely, assuring Agnes that there was not the least cause for haste, that they should get to the inn at least ten minutes before the coach. But Agnes could not listen to reason. She had got over the stile, and stood there in a fever of impatience for her mother to join her, fidgeting and fretting because Mrs Gordon went a little out of her way to pluck a flower which had caught her eye.

“See, Agnes,” she said, when she came up; “is not this the beautiful dwarf orchis which we used to find on the hill-side near the Witch’s Apron?”

“I daresay it is. Perhaps so. I don’t know. But please, mamma, come on,” was the hasty answer. And Mrs Gordon, seeing that her orchis could not at present have its claims to admiration properly appreciated, laid

it carefully in her basket until it could be better attended to.

As Mrs Gordon had said, they got to the inn long before the coach—so long, indeed, that Agnes had full time first to feel afraid, and then to make sure that some accident had happened. At the very last she set off to the corner of the street to look for it, and finding it unexpectedly near, had a quick race to be back at the inn-door in time.

The four boys sat conspicuous in a row, smiling, nodding, and pointing to the precious basket at their feet. Malcolm and Colin swung themselves down almost before the horses had stopped. The more composed Lionel held Cecil back from following them, and called upon the others to come and help him down.

“Never mind chattering there, Malcolm,” he cried, impatiently; “can’t you do the talking afterwards, and look after Cecil now?”

Malcolm, Colin, and Agnes were too busy to hear, and Mrs Gordon could not at the instant get forward. A gentleman who had been sitting near the boys offered his aid.

“Oh, thank you,” said Lionel. “If you would be so very good as to give this little fellow your hand; he can’t help himself.”

Cecil coloured high at the imputation, and at the gentleman’s kindly, “Come away then, my child.” But the pleasant smile which accompanied the offensive words could not be resisted, and without remonstrating, he suffered himself to be lifted down and set upon the

pavement, as if he had really been the child he was called. The gentleman offered his hand to Lionel.

"Oh, thank you, I can manage for myself," he said, "if those idle fellows would only take the basket. Malcolm, I say, what are you doing? Why can't you come and lift down the rabbits?"

At the word rabbits, the children's attention was at once caught. All four rushed forward into dangerous proximity to the wheels, and held up their hands to receive the precious burden. Freed from it, Lionel sprang lightly to the ground. They gathered in a knot round the basket; Agnes on her knees on the dusty pavement, and all quite regardless of the stream of passengers swarming from the top, and out from the inside of the coach, stumbling over them, pushing them about, and abusing them in no measured terms. Mrs Gordon tried to interfere.

"Wait until you get home, my dears," she said; "you can't open the basket here. Malcolm, you are in that lady's way. Colin, my dear boy, that box! you will certainly get your head broken."

At the sound of her voice, the gentleman who had helped Lionel started and looked round.

"Mrs Gordon of Eagle's Crag!" he cried.

It was her turn to start and exclaim—

"Oh, Mr Douglas! is that really you? Where did you come from? When did you come home? How is your sister?"

"Better, much better. Well, indeed, I think," he answered, as they shook hands warmly. "We came home

last night. This morning I got a letter telling me of my uncle's dangerous illness. I came in to get on by the night-coach to see him. If it had not been for that summons, and some business which could not be put off, I should have been at Eagle's Crag this forenoon. But apparently you are not at home just now."

"At home, though not at Eagle's Crag," she said.
"Eagle's Crag is our home no longer."

He looked surprised, anxious, and yet afraid to ask an explanation. With a cheerful smile she answered his look—

"This is no place for explanations. Come home, and take tea with us; you have plenty of time before the coach starts—and my husband will be so glad to see you."

He consented; and while he gave directions to the landlord of the inn about his seat in the coach and about his luggage, Mrs Gordon turned again to her children.

They had opened the basket, and the boys were trying to point out the different rabbits to Agnes, amidst the soft, moving mass of fur, of long ears, and restless snuffing noses.

"Oh, there are Lion's good broad ears," she cried, in an ecstasy; "and there is Spottie's foot, I know it by the dear little brown fleck; and there is Blanche's sweet, neat, wee face—look, mamma!"

"No, my dear, nor must you. Not another peep, Agnes," she said, decidedly, closing the basket. "Come, there must be an end of this; I cannot have you little plagues blocking up the whole pavement, like a parcel

of rubbish as you are—you will get yourselves indicted as a nuisance. Here, Lionel," handing the basket to him ; "can you and Malcolm carry it home?"

"I should think so," they cried, indignantly ; "we carried it all the way from Ferncairn to the coach."

"Well, then, away with you at once, and tell papa that Mr Douglas of Glen"— But they did not hear. They were gone. If they might not look at their darlings again, except at home, the sooner they got there the better. So away they went, the two bearers with the basket between them, at a business-like pace between a quick walk and a trot, the other three running beside and hovering round them, now stumbling over a box or bundle, now slipping off the pavement, getting nearly pushed over by a burly man here, nearly pushing over a little child there, looking at nothing, caring for nothing, but their precious rabbits.

"Are these children really yours?" Mr Douglas asked, looking from the tall sturdy lads to their mother, with her slight girlish figure, and her bright young-looking face, shaded with its soft brown curls.

"Really," she answered, laughing, "and three more besides. You have seen the two old boys and Agnes before. Lionel and Malcolm might have remembered your name ; but their heads and hearts are full of their rabbits just now. When you see them at tea, I hope they may have returned to better sense and better manners. Are you ready?" and she led the way to her house.

Glen More and Eagle's Crag were only about there

miles apart. Their proprietors were about the same age, and had been from early boyhood fast friends. When at home, scarcely a day passed in which they did not contrive to meet. But for the last ten years, Mr Douglas had been on the Continent with his mother and sister, who were both threatened with consumption. Mrs Douglas had died the previous winter, and the daughter, though better, had been still so delicate, that the brother had not ventured to bring her back to our "north country," until summer had fairly set in. During his long absence he had corresponded with Mr Gordon, but not very frequently, and he had not heard of their losses.

To save her husband the pain of doing so, Mrs Gordon briefly gave the history as they walked down to Sunny Brae. He was more moved than she was. He thought of her as he had seen her a young, beautiful, and intensely happy bride coming home to her husband's house. He remembered the luxury and elegance which had surrounded her when last he had seen her, and how well she had filled and adorned her position as the mistress of almost unbounded wealth, as at once the idol and the grace of the society in which she had moved, and he could not bear to realise the change. He looked with intense disgust upon the mean-looking dingy-gray house which she so cheerfully pointed out as her new home, and was more than half angry, when, in answer to his expression of grief, she said softly, but so trustingly, "He hath done all things well."

"And her poor husband. How he must feel for her, if

she does not feel for herself," he thought, as he followed her into the sitting-room. "Poor fellow, poor fellow! How utterly he must be overborne and overwhelmed for her sake and for the children's."

He had walked to the window, and looking out, his eye fell at once upon the object of his thoughts. Mr Gordon had been tempted from his study by the merry hum of the children's voices, and stood surrounded by the whole eight, looking as little as possible like a poor fellow, or one utterly or at all overborne or overwhelmed. He was tantalising Blanche by holding one of the rabbits just out of her reach, smiling down upon her, his handsome face as bright and animated as ever, his figure, carriage, and dress, with all the careless grace, the unmistakable air of gentlemanliness which Mr Douglas so well remembered. He turned to say something of the kind to Mrs Gordon; but she had left the room, and as he looked again out of the window, he saw her go down by the garden hedge to tell her husband of his arrival.

Mr Gordon had now given the rabbit into Blanche's arms, and was stooping over her, a hand under each elbow guiding her to the door of the house, and watching that she did not let her burden fall. When his wife spoke to him, he looked instantly up to the window with the old, eager, joyous welcome of their schoolboy days. For a moment Mr Douglas forgot how many years had passed since then. In another minute the friends had met, were shaking hands, asking innumerable questions about each other's welfare, passing jesting remarks upon

each other's appearance just as they had been used to do before care or sorrow had touched either heart.

By and by Mrs Gordon made her appearance, followed by her goodly train of children, and they sat down to tea. A tray of tempting eatables was brought in by Bell, looking vexed, ashamed, and almost sulky. Ashamed, good woman, not for herself to be seen "acting flunkey," as she phrased it; but deeply ashamed that Mr Gordon of Eagle's Crag should entertain Mr Douglas of Glen More in such a room, and with no better attendance than what a clumsy, blundering body like her could give.

"My only comfort," she said to the sympathising Nelly, when she got back to the kitchen—"My only comfort is, that Mr Colin Gordon had the sense to send money to buy back the old family plate. And really those old-fashioned things hae a sicht mair o' gude honest siller about them, an' hae mair the look o' having belonged to an ancient and honourable family than the fine new anes that gaed at the sale."

Poor Bell did not know how little either the fashion or weight of the silver tea-pot or cream-jug were looked at or thought of; as little as Nelly imagined that her choice scones and cakes, her delicately cut and carefully fried slices of ham, were bestowed upon utterly indifferent and unappreciating consumers. The three friends were wholly occupied with each other, and had no thought to give to what they ate, or how it was served.

Could Mr Douglas have known beforehand under what circumstances he should meet these old friends, he

would have planned and imagined a kind of conversation very different from the reality. He would have expected that both he and they should be wholly occupied with their misfortunes, and that the hour should be passed in hearing all details of what they had suffered, and how they proposed to live ; but it was not so. As of old, Mr and Mrs Gordon showed themselves so deeply interested in all that interested him, recollecting so clearly all his peculiar feelings and tastes, understanding so fully how each event of pleasure or pain, of joy or sorrow, must have affected him ; that before he had time to think about it, he found himself describing all he had done, thought, or felt, during these years of separation, and giving them full particular details of his mother's sufferings, of her last hours, and peaceful death,—details which he could have given to no other friend, but which it soothed and comforted him inexpressibly to dwell upon to such sympathising, tender-hearted listeners.

The children had, of course, no active share in this conversation ; but Agnes listened, and made her own observations upon it.

“ To be sure it is, as mamma says, sympathy is the best sunshine,” she remarked to Lionel, as, dismissed by a permissive nod and smile from their mother, the five went down-stairs together to attend to their pets.

“ What do you mean by that just now ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, did you not see what a happiness it was to Mr Douglas to tell papa and mamma all his troubles, because he saw that they understood and felt for him ? ”

“ That is like what you did, Lionel, for that old

man on the top of the coach this morning," Cecil observed.

"What man? What did Lionel do?" asked Agnes, always eager to hear anything to the praise of Lionel, who was her hero.

"Did not you see a poor, tall, thin man, with gray, worn cheeks and shabby clothes, sitting beside us on the coach this morning?" Cecil answered. "Poor old man, he has had so many misfortunes. His wife and all his children are dead; a friend ran away with a great deal of his money; then his crops failed, and his horses went lame, and I don't know what evil did not happen to him."

"He was never hanged, drawn, and quartered, that I know of," Lionel said, composedly.

They all laughed.

"But what did Lionel do?" persisted Agnes.

"Why, what could I do on the top of the coach, you little goose?"

"Yes, but you did do him good," Cecil said; "you tempted him on to tell all about his sorrows, just as mamma and papa are doing to Mr Douglas. And it seemed the greatest comfort to him to talk. And you listened so interestedly, and asked the right questions in quite the right place, and"—

"Well, well! There, that'll do. If you go on this way, asking and answering wrong questions in the wrong place, the rabbits won't get their supper till midnight," Lionel interrupted, ungraciously. He could not bear to be talked about.

So they scattered themselves over the orchard, seeking for dandelions as a treat, and gathering as much grass and clover as they thought might serve for the morrow, as well as for that night.

By the time the rabbits were supped it was nearly the hour when Mr Douglas was to join the coach, and he came down with their father and mother to make acquaintance with the children, to whom he had as yet hardly spoken. He inspected and admired all their arrangements for their pets, and delighted their hearts by promising to send them a terrier puppy as soon as it was old enough to leave its mother. Thanking him heartily, they asked what kind it was ; and learning that it was of the south country breed, they all expressed great satisfaction.

“Don’t you like the Skye terriers ?” he asked.

“Oh, they are good, faithful creatures,” Lionel answered ; “but they have not half so much character, they have not the sense of humour, that the south country ones have.”

“Indeed,” Mr Douglas said, laughing ; “I never considered the subject in that light.”

Lionel coloured, and did not speak. He did not like to be laughed at.

“Have you had experience of both kinds ?” Mr Douglas asked. “Do you speak from experience ?”

Agnes answered for him.

“Yes, we had a sweet little gray Skye terrier, called Grisly, and a Dandy Dinmont, called Bounce. Grisly was a sweet, affectionate little creature, but not nearly

so interesting as Bounce. He did whatever we bade him, or whatever we taught him, but he had not Bounce's clever way of finding out devices for himself. If Bounce could not do a thing one way, he'd try another, and another, until he got it done."

"Bounce was such an independent dog," joined in Malcolm ; "he had such a thorough sense of his own position, his own importance. Perfectly good-tempered he was, but it was a dignified kind of good temper that would not be trifled with, that would not submit to undue liberties being taken with him."

"Then they were so different about liking to be made of," said Agnes, "Grisly was so very fond of being petted and carried about in one's arms, or taken upon one's lap. Bounce was affectionate as could be, but he always looked as if he rather condescended to be made of, than cared for it. He seemed to think the favour was all on his side when he allowed us to pet him."

Mr Douglas seemed greatly amused.

"I see," he said, "that you, little lady, like people best who don't care to be made a work about."

"I don't know about people, only about dogs," she said, blushing ; "nor even altogether about dogs. It was very pleasant to have sweet little Grisly nestling into your lap, and asking so fondly for love and praises ; but then one had more respect for Bounce."

"Oh yes, indeed, Bounce was quite a dog to be respected," cried one or two of the boys.

Lionel added, "He was so straightforward and honest ; there was no humbug about him."

"And yet he was so amusing sometimes," put in Agnes, "when he took it into his head to be affected, and to put on fine lady airs, and hang his head on one side, and languish with his eyes."

"The thing in Bounce that I admired most," observed Mr Gordon, "was the genial, hearty way in which he greeted other dogs, wagging his tail, looking so glad to see them, and giving them full credit for being as good-tempered and friendly as himself. But if they did not meet his advances in the same spirit, if they looked stiff, haughty, and combative, he stood upon his dignity in a moment, and was ready to fight if they chose."

"But no one ever saw him fight a dog less than himself," said Lionel; "and yet he had so much pluck, although he never wanted to fight, he'd stand up to a dog twice his size, if he was obliged to do it; and if he got knocked over, he never minded, but was up again and ready for action in a minute."

"Well, I don't know how your puppy may turn out," said Mr Douglas. "A second Bounce, I hope; but he is only a few days old, and has as yet neither shape nor character."

They had been walking slowly up to the town while talking, and now, when they had got to the top of the hill, they saw the coach all ready at the inn-door. Mr Douglas stopped, and feeling in his pocket, brought out a purple morocco case, which he put into Agnes's hands.

"There, little lady," he said. "I put that in my pocket this morning, when I hoped to get over to Eagle's

Crag to see you all. I brought it home for Eagle's Crag in general, or for any member in particular to whom it might be suitable. I did not recollect how the girls and boys came in. But, since I find you so nearly a young lady, I think it must be your property."

Agnes's cheek flushed, and she looked eagerly at her mother for leave to accept the present.

"Certainly, my dear, from so good an old friend," Mrs Gordon smilingly said, in answer to her look.

"From papa's oldest friend," added Mr Douglas.

Agnes, with a heart beating fast with pleasure, opened the case. Within lay a box like a large square snuff-box of dark enamel, with a picture of some of the Swiss mountains beautifully painted on the lid. Mr Douglas took it gently from her, and lifting the box from its case, he took up a key like a watch-key which lay beside it, and which fitted into a hole with a short pipe at the bottom of the box. With the key he wound it up like a watch, and instantly, as he gave it back into the little girl's hands, there rose a strain of clear, tinkling, fairy-like music. The children had never seen or heard of such a toy before. The boys gathered round Agnes in ecstasy, while she stood holding the box, her cheeks flushed with delight and with pride to be the proprietor of such a treasure.

"O mamma, is it not beautiful!" she cried. "Quite music for the fairies, mamma. We must take it up to our prettiest spots on the hillside, and all your fairies that paint the flowers and brighten the green leaves, and set them dancing in the sun, will come round us to listen."

“No,” said Lionel, “the song of the bees and the birds is the most fit music for these out-of-door fairies. Let us keep our box in the house, and set it a-playing on dull, wet days, or long winter evenings, when we want something to cheer us, and then the fireside fairies will come out and dance on the hearthstone.”

Mr Douglas was much amused. He was not accustomed to children, or to their many fancies, and they interested him much.

“Well,” he said, “I must go now. But I must really come back soon to be introduced to all these fairies, fireside and hillside, with whom you seem so intimate.”

“Coach ready, sir,” interrupted the gruff coachman, touching his hat.

So they had to shake hands at once. Mr Douglas got into the coach and drove off, while the Gordons turned towards home. The tinkling bells were still ringing out their music in tones so delicate, and yet so full of sweetness, so clear and distinct. Agnes carried the box, the boys crowding round her. Now and then they stood still to listen, and then ran on again to overtake their father and mother, that they might share the pleasure. So occupied were they, that they did not at all observe in what direction they were moving, until, just as they reached the gate into the garden the last strain rang out, the music was over. Then, as the children looked up and saw where they were, there was a general cry of complaint and remonstrance: “Surely we are not going home. Surely we are not to be cheated of our Saturday night’s walk.”

Mr Gordon always gave up his work at an early hour on Saturday, so as to make sure that it should not be in his thoughts on the Sabbath. The children had learned to look upon it as their right that he should spend the whole evening with them and take them a walk, and they were by no means willing to forego their rights. Mr Gordon looked at his watch, and said that it was too late to set out on a walk.

“Should not we have time to go down this west road and come up by the east?” Mrs Gordon suggested.

Mr Gordon consented, and advised Agnes to give her musical box to one of the boys, that he might run with it to the house and leave it in safety. Malcolm, always obliging, held out his hand for it, and Agnes a little reluctantly gave it to him. They walked on, and in a minute or so Malcolm overtook them.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHILDREN TRY THE SUNSHINE OF SYMPATHY UPON DAVID RATTRAY.

MR and Mrs Gordon began to speak of the pleasure of seeing their old friend again.

“How much he liked to tell us of his anxieties about his mother and sister,” Mr Gordon observed to his wife.

“Ah, papa, you see it is as mamma says, sympathy is the best sunshine,” Agnes said.

“Does mamma say so? And you think that she is right?”

“Yes; I am sure of it,” she answered, confidently. “I know it by myself. And, papa, do you know I think sympathy is, besides, the sweetest flower which we can give to our friends.”

“Very good, my little maiden. But, Agnes, we must not forget that if we neglect our rose-bushes, our carnations, and lilies, through the winter and spring, no mere wishes can make them bring forth fair and perfect flowers when we go in the summer time to seek them.”

"No. But how do you mean? I don't quite understand how that applies."

"If we are not careful to teach ourselves to be thoughtful and considerate—if we do not take pains to understand the character and feelings of our friends—we cannot expect to be able to sympathise with them at any moment when we wish to do so."

"Why, no, papa. I suppose not," she assented, thoughtfully.

"Mamma is looking grave," said Mr Gordon, turning to her. "Do you not think I am right?"

"Of course I do," she answered. "But I have been all day doubting whether it is quite safe to dwell so much upon this thought of the home sunshine, and of planting sweet flowers in the home garden."

"Not safe! O mamma, is not it more than safe? Is not it good?" cried Agnes, eagerly. "You don't know how often the thought has made me see little things to do for you all that I might never have thought of; reminded me to fetch what I knew you should soon want, or to put back your books where they could be easily found; to set papa's chair and footstool as he likes them; to see that the feet of Lionel's table are rightly turned before he begins to draw; to find Colin's slate in good time; to look after the mending of Blanche's doll and Ned's cart, and a hundred and fifty things which are right for me to do as the only big girl, but which I never used to think of."

"And I know that the thought of the home sunshine has kept me fifty or a hundred times from saying hard,

unkind things, which might have brought a cloud over it," Lionel confessed, in a way very unusual to him.

"And kept me from fretting over wet days or long lessons," chimed in Colin.

"All very true and right," their mother answered. "What Agnes calls the prettiness and the pleasantness of the thought, do often help you to do the right thing. But what I fear is, that to dwell too much upon this view of the subject, may tempt us to forget that to bear one another's burdens, to consider one another, to be kind and tender-hearted towards each other, are duties positively commanded us by God; and that we are bound and should delight to fulfil them because He has commanded us, whether there be any pretty poetical idea attached to them or not."

"Very true," said Mr Gordon. "There is a danger."

Lionel and Agnes looked thoughtful. They and Cecil were, I believe, really children of God, whose hearts God had by His grace touched and changed, the eyes of whose understanding He had opened to see the evil and hatefulness of sin, and their own helpless, lost state as sinners in His sight, and whom He had enabled to give themselves up to Christ, to be saved from the punishment and power of sin by Him. They did really know something of the happiness of keeping God's law, and of walking in the path of His commandments; and they were much impressed by what their mother had said.

While they were still thinking about it, a boy from the village met and passed them. He was about Malcolm's age, poorly dressed, a stout, hardy, rather good-looking

boy. Glances of recognition, but not of friendship, passed between him and the little Gordons. On his side a look, bold, insolent, and mocking; on theirs one of scorn and defiance.

“Who is that boy? You seem to know him,” Mr Gordon said, when the lad was out of hearing.

“One of the worst boys in the place, one whom no one likes or speaks well of,” Lionel said, sententiously.

“Poor fellow!” said Mrs Gordon. “Can you do nothing for him to make him feel more pleasantly, more rightly?”

“O mamma! you have no idea what a spiteful, bad boy he is,” cried Malcolm, “nor what pleasure he takes in setting up impudence to us, and doing us mischief.”

“Still,” she persisted, “is there no little, tiny blossom of sympathy or kindness which you could find for him, to soften him and do him good?”

“I should like to see myself try,” was Lionel’s scornful answer.

“Is there no burden of his which God has laid upon you to bear for him?” she added, still more earnestly, as if she had not heard him.

Lionel was silent. His heart smote him. He felt that he was feeling wrongly, unlike a Christian, unlike what God wished him to feel.

“What could one do? How could one sympathise with such a boy?” Malcolm asked.

“Is not his state sorrowful enough? Can you not feel for its sorrowfulness?” she answered. “Lionel says he is the worst boy in the town. I suppose by that he

means, that he is more opposed to God than any other boy, more decidedly God's enemy. Is not that a fearful position? You say that no one likes him. Is not that dreary enough to awaken your pity? Can you believe that God will be pleased if you look upon a fellow-creature in so sore and sorrowful a case, and pass him coldly by, without even trying to help him?"

Agnes looked up with eyes brimming with tears. Her heart thrilled at the tender pity of her mother's voice. A flush of sorrow and shame spread slowly over Lionel's cheek. He was feeling himself in God's presence. God seemed to speak to him through his mother.

"If one could do anything," Malcolm said, feelingly; "but he is so bold, so hard, you can hardly fancy."

"If mamma were not here," said Mr Gordon, "I could tell you a story that might help you to know what to do."

"Is it about mamma?" cried one or two. "Oh, please tell it. Never mind although mamma is here."

"But she might object. She might interfere, and tell me not to say this or that," Mr Gordon urged, with mock gravity.

"Oh, but she need not listen," cried Colin. "Mamma, don't listen. Think of these sheep and lambs. Don't attend to what papa says."

"Well," said Mr Gordon, smiling, "if we may take for granted that mamma's spirit is elsewhere, that her ears are closed, I shall venture. Some years ago there lived at Eagle's Crag a blacksmith and his wife called Wade. Prosperous, hard-working, respectable people

they were, but more harsh-tempered, utterly disagreeable, than any I ever met with before or since. No one liked them, they liked no one, held intercourse with none. Even a smile or a friendly good-day, when you met them in the road, was looked upon as an insult. And if you happened to see the wife in their little garden, and stopped as if you wished to speak to her, she would dash into her cottage and slam to the door as a broad hint that you must keep at a respectful distance."

"Horrid people!" interrupted Agnes.

"Poor, miserable people," said Mr Gordon. "Who are so miserable, so much to be pitied, as those who have no kindness, no gentleness in their hearts? But, what was worse than all the rest, they were a thoroughly godless couple. They never entered a church, sneered at religion and religious people, and never had there been a Bible in the house until their children required it for their class at the parish school, when they begged to get one, and it was got for them as any other lesson book might have been."

"They had children, then?"

"Yes, three little girls," Mrs Gordon said.

"And what were they like, mamma?" Agnes asked.

"The eldest was a dark, sullen-looking girl, very like her mother; but, as nurse used to say of people, she was better than she looked. She was shy, and had that kind of pride which makes shyness look like sullenness; but there was a great deal of unselfishness and of deep, true feeling in her nature. There was much good in her, only she was not attractive."

“And the other two?”

“Were as sweet, fascinating, loving, lovable children as ever I knew,” Mrs Gordon answered, with enthusiasm. “They reminded one of the old story of the sweet, tender blossoms growing round an old gnarled root. The second was dark like the rest of her family, but she was gloriously beautiful, with very fine features, and such hazel eyes as I never saw before, so clear, and yet so deep, so full of expression and of feeling. One could not look upon her without feeling sure that she would grow up a noble woman, with depths, melting depths of love and truth in her heart, which no one might ever fathom, which no one should ever find to fail. The youngest, Minnie, was a sweet little rosebud, a sunbeam, a fairy,—one could not find a name sweet enough for her. She had not the least resemblance to any of them. She was dazzlingly fair, with shining golden curls, deep blue eyes, glancing like violets from under her fair broad brow, and such an exquisite little mouth.”

“And did the parents care for them?” asked one of the children.

“Caring was not the word,” she answered, “they perfectly idolised them. Their love for their children was the one bright, I might say the one human spot in their cold, unlovely natures. It was not an affection, it was a passion. Do you remember,” to her husband, “how touching it was to see Roger with the little one in his arms, her little cherub head nestled into his neck, her bright shining locks mingling with his harsh, dusty, uncombed hair, her face, with all its delicate colouring, its

exquisite childishness and beauty, pressed against his, so gray, so harsh-featured, so unpleasing?"

Agnes, with her passion for children, delighted in this description of the lovely Minnie; but the boys were less interested, and asked their father to go on with the story.

"From the time we first heard about these people, from the time we had found out their terrible state of enmity to God and man, their hard unloving lives—for at that time we knew nothing of the children—mamma's whole heart was stirred with deep pity, with earnest desire to do them good; but how to gain access to them? They would speak to no one. Even our good minister, with all his tenderness and kindness, could make no way with them. After his first visit the door was bolted the moment they saw him come into their garden; and once when he met the woman in the road, and tried to speak to her, she nearly struck him, poured forth a volley of curses and fearful oaths, and dashed rudely past before he could say another word. Mamma tried to gain her confidence, to make some kindness grow up between them by pleasant remarks upon her flowers, her poultry, her pigs, and by praises of her children; but it was all in vain. Often no other answer could be got than a rude, insolent stare; and now and then she was silenced by such a speech as, 'What is that to you?' 'Who asked your opinion?' Still her pity, her anxiety to do them good, went on growing with every repulse, with every fresh instance of how much had to be done."

"O mamma, how could you?" cried Agnes. "I know it was right; but so horribly disagreeable, so uninteresting as they were."

"It was because they were so horribly disagreeable that I felt more drawn to pity and help them," she said, simply. "No one else could bear them. It seemed as if God had put them in my way to do them good, because no one else cared for them."

"But how did you do?" asked Lionel.

Mr Gordon answered for her.

"Everything that was possible," he said. "Much that would have been impossible to any one but to her; and first she began at the right beginning. She set apart a time every forenoon to pray for them, and for herself, that she might be taught how to help them. Then, having put the case before the Lord, she rose each day from her knees, ready and anxious to set to work upon anything which God might give her to do."

"As she could make no way with the parents, she set herself to win the hearts of the children. Almost every day she watched for them as they came home from school, and met them with kind smiles and words. Often she prepared a little gift for them, a flower, an apple, a cake, a small book, a pincushion; and always she walked a little way with them, and asked about their school, their books, their work, anything or everything that interested them. Here success was rapid and sure. At the very beginning the little ones' hearts were won. They learned to watch for her as earnestly as she for them, would run to meet her, tell her all that was in

their minds, and, as their father afterwards told me, talk of her from morning till night as their own lady, their kind lady, their dearest lady. Even the grave, shy Esther was won after a week or two. Her face, too, would brighten as she caught sight of mamma, she would walk by her side, steal her hand silently into hers, and had soon given her a warm place in her large, strong heart."

"And did not the father and mother feel this?" Agnes asked.

"I hardly know. I don't think they knew themselves. They were moved, but not altogether in the right direction. The mother, at least, was jealously afraid that her children should love any one as well as their father and mother; and, at any rate, she never softened her manner towards us. So months passed on, until more than twelve were gone; and still mamma prayed, and watched and worked.

"In the second autumn after they came to our part of the country, scarlet fever broke out in the district. It was of a most fatal kind, and raged like a pestilence."

"Oh, that was when we had it, when Colin and Cecil were babies!" asked Lionel. "I can only just remember being very ill. I should not have known that it was scarlet fever, or recollect it at all, only nurse used so often to speak of it."

"Yes, that was the time. We were most tenderly dealt with," Mr Gordon said, with much feeling. "Only you, Lionel, were at all seriously ill. The babies hardly

drooped their heads under it ; as nurse used to say, they never looked over their shoulders. Quickly and lightly the shadow passed over our home ; but fearfully black did it lie on the village. I do not know that there was a house where there was not sickness, and fear and trembling ; and in every second one at least were grief and wailing for the dead.

“One bright October morning the shadow fell upon the Wades’ hearth. By twelve o’clock the next night the three young lives were done.”

“O papa, how pitiful ! how terrible ! All ! Not one left !” cried two or three voices at once, with trembling lips. Agnes could not speak. Her cheeks had turned pale, her eyes were full of tears. Mr Gordon went on with deep feeling—

“So soon as we heard of it the next morning, mamma hastened to the house. As she reached the door, two neighbours came out, who had been kindly dressing the little dead bodies. They advised mamma not to go in. They said that the cold, stony despair of the father, the mad, angry passion of the mother, were too terrible to witness ; but mamma had not gone there to witness anything, or to care about how she should bear it. Only, if she could, to do a little, to do any good.

“She knocked at the door. For the first time there was no harsh desire that she should not come in. There was no answer. She went in. The mother lay on the bed as she had thrown herself there the night before —her clothes all on, and tumbled about her, her dark hair over her neck and face—moaning and tossing up

her arms in ceaseless, restless agony. The father sat still, cold as a stone beside the hearth. The fire had gone out. The grate was filled with dead, gray ashes, looking strangely dreary as the bright October sun poured in upon them.

“Mamma did not speak. She only stepped softly across the room to the bed where the three lay side by side, the little golden-haired one between her two darker sisters. Their faces were uncovered and beautiful, exceedingly beautiful they were in that touching stillness and repose. Even Esther’s harsh features were refined and beautiful by the hand of death. The dark, rather coarse skin, had got the polish and fairness of marble, and on her mouth was a smile of sweetness and peace such as had seldom graced it in life ; but the other two, who can tell how exquisitely lovely they were ! The disease had been so short that there was no wasting of their rounded cheeks, no marring of their childish beauty. Minnie’s long lashes lay upon her fair cheek ; and smiles and laughter no longer stirring the little features, their exquisite beauty was fully seen.

“ You do not ask, as you might, how I know all this. Mamma told me what she saw ; Roger and Martha Wade what she did.

“ As she stood looking she did not speak. She could not. How could she, with a sight so touchingly beautiful before her eyes, speaking to her heart ? She stood for some time quite still, looking at them, and only now and then wiping away the tears which dimmed her eyes. After a little she stooped down and kissed each

cold face, and laid on each little breast a late white moss rosebud, which she had found in the garden, and had brought for the purpose. She tenderly wiped away a tear-drop, which had fallen on Minnie's forehead, and smoothed down a corner of the coverlet which had been ruffled.

“The mother had given over her restless tossing and moaning to watch mamma with jealous eyes. That tearful silence, that gentle, tender touching of the little bodies, were understood by her, and moved her. Moved her so much, that when mamma came across the room, sat down by her bed, and took her hand in hers, she did not draw it away. Mamma said only, ‘I am so sorry, so sorry,’ and bowed down her head to hide her tears; but they fell quick and warm on the mother’s hard, rough hand, and went straight to her heart. Slowly, one by one, with a violent, painful effort, as it were, tears rose to her eyes too, brimmed over, and ran down her cheeks. Then was the ice-band melting from her heart; and after a little she began to speak in broken words of all that her darlings had been to her, and of what the world was without them. Mamma did not speak, she only sat holding her hand, and listened with that earnest, pitying, full-hearted listening, which only such as she, unselfish, loving, can give to the sorrow of another.”

“Come, now, that will do,” Mrs Gordon interrupted, smiling a little, colouring a great deal.

“But, mamma, you were not to listen,” cried Colin.
“Please go on, papa.”

“Yes, go on. Never mind mamma,” cried Agnes,

pushing in between her father and mother. "Say it again; it is so good, so true. She listened with the full-hearted listening, which only such as she, unselfish and loving, can give."

"Exactly," Mr Gordon resumed. "She did not try to comfort, or to reason away the sorrow, as those do who are impatient of another's grief; but she made the poor, torn, bruised heart of the mother feel how fully she understood the sorrow which had crushed her, how she entered into those tender, lingering recollections of all her children's beauty and goodness, into those restless, agonising yearnings to hear once more their sweet young voices, to see one more look of love from those dear eyes, to feel one more folding of the little arms round her neck. She sat thus holding the mother's hand until she saw that fatigue and grief were beginning to tell, and that Martha, now quieter, seemed almost ready to sleep. Then she rose to go away. Hitherto she had not tried to teach them, she had only pitied. Now, as she stood a moment by the bedside, she said softly—

"Did you hear the verse that darling Minnie learned last Sabbath, and which she liked so much?" and without waiting for a reply, she repeated, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'

"Then she stepped gently back to the little ones' bed, kissed them again, and looking down on them, she again repeated the verse slowly, softly, and said, 'Yes, darlings, you know now what it is to be free from condemnation—to be in and with Christ Jesus.'"

"They were good children, then?" Cecil asked.

"Yes; I should have told you before that of the two little ones we had almost a certainty, young as they were, and of Esther a strong, good hope, that Christ had drawn them to Himself, and given them His most precious gift of a new heart."

"And what did the father do all this time?"

"He sat by the hearth, still, motionless, almost lifeless; he seemed, mamma said, like a figure cut out of cold dark stone. But he had seen all, heard all, felt all; and as mamma passed him to go out, he said in a hoarse voice, and without raising his eyes, 'Come again!'"

"And she went?"

"Oh yes, of course she went. You were all better then; she could leave you. She went two or three times that day, two or three times every day until the funeral. At every visit, as at the first, she tempted them on to tell her what they felt, to open up their sorrows to her. And every time, before she left them, she repeated a text or a verse of a hymn which the little ones had loved; and in spite of their enmity to the Bible, they listened and were moved because their children had loved them. And she spoke about the glorious home to which the little ones were gone, and of the God and Saviour with whom they now abode, and the names were no longer hateful to their ears because their darlings were there. So she led them slowly on, step by step. At first they listened for their children's sake, and for hers. But soon for their own. And so it was, that before the first snow whitened the little graves, both father and mother had

given their hearts to the Saviour who had carried their little lambs in His bosom."

"And what became of them?" asked Agnes.

"People will tell you that no such thing ever happens in real life. And yet, hard and stern as they were by nature, and strong of body, sorrow withered up their life and strength. And before two years were over, both lay beside their darlings.

"Roger went first. He never did a day's work again. His strength faded from him he knew not how. His arm could no longer lift his hammer. He could no longer steady the iron upon his anvil. They had laid by a good deal of money; they had always been toiling and saving and laying by for their children. And it lasted as long as they required it. So poor Roger spent most of the day by the fireside still and silent, or in the churchyard by their grave. And in the summer he followed them.

"In the days of their wickedness the husband and wife had been classed together; had been counted as like each other as they were unlike every one else. But even then there was a great difference between them, which became more clear afterwards. His hardness and enmity were more passive than hers. It was more that he did not care for his neighbour, than that he hated him, as was too much poor Martha's case. And so, when better things came, they sunk quietly into his heart; while she seized them with all the passion of her nature. His peace, when he got it, was calm and steady, and he never attained to great joyfulness or triumph.

He seemed to sit still, and suffer Christ to take him up, and carry him safe into the kingdom without struggle, without effort. She was often in agonies of doubt and fear; often, too, on heights of holy joy, when she could not be still, could not be silent, but must tell every one what the Lord had done for her soul. Roger continued silent and reserved to the last. Only to mamma did he ever speak, and once or twice to me. But he would sit for hours at a time with the little ones' Bible in his hand, reading over and over again any passage which spoke of Christ's salvation—of God's wondrous love. And so he faded silently away. It seemed strange that so strong, so young a man—for he was not forty—should be thus bowed down by sorrow. But you must remember that their children were their only earthly friends, and that, at the time the blow fell, they had no God to whom to go, no Saviour on whose loving, tender sympathy to lean. It fell upon them without softening, without alleviation."

"And the mother?" asked one of the children.

"She lingered longer, and her life was very different from his. So soon as her heart received the truth she yearned to carry it to others. After her husband's death she gave herself up to works of love. There was no sick-bed near her that she did not visit to nurse the body, and, if she could, to help the soul. Grave and almost stern she looked to the last. No one ever saw a smile upon her face. But those whom she could serve, and above all the little children, soon learned to forget the gravity and sternness of her manner, while they felt

the deep, the overflowing tenderness of her heart. That love which had been so passionately poured forth upon her children, was now freely given to all whom she thought God brought her to love or serve.

“This love for, and interest in others, together with the active work to which they prompted, strengthened her to endure longer than Roger. But she was restless in body and mind. She wore herself out, got fearfully thin, and what seemed at first only a slight cold, in the beginning of the second autumn after her children’s death, carried her home to join them and her husband.”

This story made a deep impression upon the children, particularly upon the three elder. They applied it to David Rattray, their village enemy, and applied it perhaps all the more profitably that they were left to make the application for themselves ; their father did not do it for them. He simply told them the story.

For the next few days they thought much and talked much of it. On the Sabbath afternoon Agnes was overheard giving Blanche and Ned a modified and shortened edition, telling them of the three little girls who loved the Lord Jesus, and whom He took home to Himself in one day ; of their parents, who had not loved God before, but who liked to hear about Him afterwards, because their children had loved Him, and whom God taught to love Him too, and took away soon to be for ever happy in His presence, and with their children round them. And when Mrs Gordon went into the dining-room on the Monday morning, she found Lionel busy making a

rough but very effective sketch of the dark, stern Roger, with his golden-haired Minnie in his arms.

They did not, however, content themselves with talking, telling stories, or drawing pictures. They were bent upon working too. Lionel was the first to try. I am not sure that he began at what his father called the right beginning. But I know Agnes did. I know that she prayed earnestly, frequently to God, that He would give her wisdom and love, teach her what to say and do, and how to say and do it. And I know that Lionel did not take the right way. He sought out Davie, resolved to show him that he, Lionel Gordon, was a perfect marvel of kindness and forbearance. And so he was laboriously, painfully condescending. Davie, quick and intelligent, easily perceived this. He fancied that Lionel wished to make up to him because he was afraid of him, because he had felt the evils of his enmity; and he triumphed accordingly. This triumph Lionel could not bear. The contest began again, more hard and bitter words passed than ever before, and Lionel retired from the field disappointed, mortified, ashamed.

Agnes was the next to try; and, to the surprise of the others, she succeeded, by going straightforward and direct to the point. She did not meet Davie until one day near the end of the week, when her mamma had sent her alone to carry a pot of jelly to a sick child. She came up to him as he lounged idly upon a gate, looking, as usual, ready for any mischief. He looked at her as she came up with one of his own peculiar looks, insolent, mocking, and said, sneeringly—

"Oh, here is our sweet little lady, carrying an elegant jam-pig. Could her ladyship not have got anything grander than that to carry?"

Agnes went straight up to him, and, looking him full in the face, said kindly and pleasantly—

"Davie, why do you always speak so disagreeably to the boys and to me? Why do you always look so disagreeably at us? It is not pleasant for us, and I don't see that it can be any pleasure to you."

He was completely taken by surprise, and only stared.

"I know we have been wrong too, but you began it. Only, we need not mind that now. We wish to do better, and to be kind and friendly with you."

"Oh, indeed!" said Davie, turning his back on her, and beginning to whistle.

A more experienced person might have seen in this turning away his head, in this assumed carelessness, even in the roughness of his tone, signs of a softening of which he was ashamed. But to poor Agnes his answer seemed discouragingly gruff and incredulous. She stood silent a moment, long enough to cry in her heart, "O Lord, help me! O Lord, soften him!" Then she said, still more pleadingly—

"Yes, indeed, we do wish it, we do mean it. Only try, Davie; you can't think how much nicer it would be to be all kind and friendly together."

"You had better begin yourselves, then," he said, bluntly, without looking round.

"Well, and have not I begun?" she asked, smilingly.

He turned, caught her smile, and a half one in answer

spread over his own face. Agnes, encouraged, began again—

“Won’t you let us try to be kind to you, and not drive us back with hard words and looks? Please say you will—please, Davie.”

“Oh, well, I’m no carin’,” he began lightly; then, with a sudden burst of confidence, he went on passionately, “I don’t know how to be kind to onybody, for naebody has been kind to me, never sin’ the day I was born. My mither wasna kind to me; she was hard an’ cruel; an’ noo that she is dead, I’ve naebody belongin’ to me but my puir little sister, an’ naebody is ever kind to her.”

“Poor, poor boy! If nobody has ever been kind to you, how should you think of being kind to any one,” Agnes said, tenderly, putting her hand upon his shoulder, as he stood bowing down his head to hide the hot tears which had forced themselves to his eyes. “But please let us try. I want so much, so very much, you can’t think how much, to be kind to you.”

Had it been a boy who thus spoke to him, the touch of pity would have irritated his pride. But from a girl he could bear it. He did not speak, but he allowed her hand to rest upon his shoulder. Agnes went on—

“But tell me about your sister. You call her your poor little sister. Is she”—

He interrupted her, rudely pushing her from him; he turned upon her fiercely. Her look of wonder seemed to satisfy him.

“I see ye dinna ken,” he muttered; “I dinna think

ye want to geck at her." Then, after a pause, he added, in a low voice, "She is no like ither folk ; she has nae sense ; she is jist a nateral."

"Oh, I am so sorry," burst almost involuntarily from her lips.

He looked keenly at her, saw that the words were perfectly, fully true, and, as if glad of her sympathy, said—

"And when I take her out, everybody points at her, an' makes game of her, and I canna stand that ; and so I lock her into our room while I'm out, and then naebody can meddle wi' her. But," drawing himself proudly up, and his eyes flashing, "I'm getting a big chiel now, an' I'll fecht ony man or boy in the place that laughs at her. I'll fecht them a', one by one, if they like."

Agnes quite liked the spirit of protection which prompted this speech. It was so like what her brothers would have felt. It gave her confidence in Davie, and emboldened her to make a request to him.

"Davie," she said, "I should like to see your sister ; I should like to try to amuse her, and to make her happy. A girl like me sometimes knows better than boys what other girls might like. Should you mind taking me to see her?"

He looked at her again very keenly. Was it idle curiosity which prompted the wish? Agnes met his keen, almost fierce look, with one full of tender compassion. Although a little wanting in her at other times, yet towards the suffering or helpless, towards very little children, very old or sick people, Agnes had much of her mother's tenderness of heart. Her eyes had filled

with tears of pity for the poor idiot—of indignation against those who could make game of her. Her face satisfied Davie.

“Well, I dinna mind if I do,” he said. “But come awa’ noo, or I’ll maybe change my mind, an’ no tak you anither time.”

“I must ask mamma,” she replied; “please hold this for me, and I’ll run back. I won’t be a minute,” and she placed the pot of jelly in his hands, and ran away.

Had there been the least appearance of hesitation to trust him with the jelly, all she had already accomplished might have been undone at once. But she did not seem to doubt him in the least; and after such confidence, nothing could have tempted him even to look into the pot, containing, as he knew, something very good—something which his lips had never tasted.

Agnes dashed breathless into the sitting-room, where her mother was.

“O mamma,” she cried, “I have spoken to Davie. He is willing to be kinder to us; and I want so much to go and see his idiot sister. May I, mamma? His poor idiot sister, mamma, who has no one but him to take care of her.”

Mrs Gordon hesitated; but Agnes pleaded earnestly.

“Please say yes, mamma. It may be the only chance of doing him good. Please say yes, mamma; and please say it quick. He says if I don’t come now, he’ll maybe never take me again.”

And Mrs Gordon, trusting a good deal to her little girl’s common sense and prudence, gave the required

consent. Agnes darted out of the house again. Davie was still waiting for her. He gave her back the jelly, and led the way without speaking.

They passed the house of the sick child, and Agnes ran in to deliver her message, and give the jelly. She scarcely heard the answer that he was better, and did not heed the mother's invitation to sit down. She was so anxious to rejoin Davie, so afraid that he might lose patience and go away. He waited, however, and was now in truth as anxious as she was that she should see his sister.

He led her to a back street in one of the worst parts of the town, and to a ruinous house. It had once been a two-story house; but the roof had fallen in, and part of the upper wall had fallen out, so that only the rooms on the ground-floor were inhabited—habitable they could scarcely be called. The door of the one nearest the entrance was open, and a coarse, vixenish-looking woman was sweeping the floor. When she saw Davie, she called out angrily—

“What brings you back at this time o' day, ye neer-do-weel? Naebody wants”— She stopped abruptly as she caught sight of Agnes.

Davie heeded neither her angry words nor their sudden stopping. He took Agnes by the hand, as if to protect her from the scold, and led her a little way along the dark passage to another door. He drew a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, opened it a little way, just enough to admit them, closed it again, and locked it on the inside.

"There she is," he whispered, plucking Agnes by the sleeve ; and pointing to a distant corner of the room, then quickly turning away his head, as if unable to bear the look of disgust which he fancied the sight must call up.

No such look of disgust would he have seen, nothing but one of the tenderest pity. And in truth she was a pitiable object. Davie had said that she was ten years old ; but she was no taller, hardly so tall, as Ned, who was only four. Her limbs were wasted and shrunken, her head unnaturally large, and so heavy that it always rested on one shoulder, or was bowed down upon her breast. She sat on a low chair, looking intensely upon a line of sunlight upon the wall opposite to her. The small window was broken, and patched with pieces of cloth and of wood, so that the room was very dark, making this one solitary ray of light look brighter by contrast, and of course bringing out more strongly every passing shadow that crossed it. For such shadows the child seemed to watch ; and whenever one passed over her line of light, she grinned, chattered, and moved her shoulders, as if with pleasure.

After a minute, Davie ventured to look at Agnes, and satisfied that she was neither disgusted nor amused, he began to whistle, and to call to the child, as he might have done to a dog.

"Hey, Madge ! Good Madge ! Davie has come back to his Madge."

She had not remarked their entrance ; but she evidently recognised her brother's voice, and slowly turning

her heavy eyes upon them, opened wide her large, shapeless mouth, and gave forth a laugh so hoarse, so unnatural, that Agnes started. Davie saw the start, and giving her a rude push, said angrily—

“Go away with you. Why did you come, if you cannot bear to see the poor child happy?”

“I can bear it. I am glad to see it,” she answered, gently. “I came here to try to make her happy. I only started, because I did not expect the sound,” and by a strong effort, conquering a feeling of reluctance, she drew nearer the poor idiot.

Davie drew nearer too, patted Madge on the head, again as he might have done to a dog, and said, soothingly—

“Good Madge. Madge good and quiet to-day. Madge not cross to-day. Good Madge.”

Again she turned to him and laughed, but her eyes went quickly back to their watching of the shadows.

“She likes to see the shadows pass,” Davie explained to Agnes, at the same time placing himself behind her chair, and nodding and shaking his head so as to make a quickly moving shadow for her amusement.

Agnes suddenly recollected the rabbits she had so often made upon the wall for the babies at home, and twisting up her fingers as most children know how to do, she had soon two rabbits dancing and mouthing at each other in the line of sunlight. Poor Madge was delighted, and grinned and chattered more than ever. She got off her chair, and hobbling painfully to the wall, tried to catch the dancing figures, while Agnes now

lowered and now raised them again out of her reach. Agnes recollected how little Willie used to do the same thing, and her heart ached for the poor idiot, as she recollected that even he, only two years old, had now too much sense to expect to catch a shadow.

As she moved her arm up and down, one end of the scarf she wore round her neck got loose, and danced before Madge's eyes. With a wild unearthly cry she caught it, and laughed and chattered over it in ecstasy. It was a bright-coloured scarf which Agnes's uncle had sent her from India. The ends were of crimson satin embroidered with gold and gay floss silks. Davie explained that Madge was "daft" about bright colours.

"Oh, I can bring her pieces of silk and gilt paper," cried Agnes. Then she suddenly recollected that she had in her pocket a piece of sponge-cake, sugared on the top, which had been given to her the day before, and which she had saved for the sick child.

She took it out and gave it to Madge. The poor child had never tasted such a dainty before, and she munched and laughed, and laughed and munched, in a way that made Agnes's heart ache again, so painfully animal-like was her pleasure. Davie, more accustomed to her, and less sensitive, was intensely gratified, and watched her with an expression of affectionate, unselfish delight. At this moment some one tried to open the door, and finding it locked, knocked hard and demanded admission. Davie made no answer to the demand.

"It's only that Mother Hubbard yont the house, who

looks after us, or who should look after us. I never heed her," he explained to Agnes.

Agnes said, however, that she must go now, as her mother had told her not to stay.

"But I may come again, may I not?" she asked.

"Ou ay, come as often as ye like," responded Davie, cordially. "I'll come to the house ilka mornin', an' hing about till I see ye; an' ye can tell me if ye want to come that day or no; an' I'll be here to let you in."

He opened the door for her, but closed it resolutely upon the woman whom Agnes had seen at the outer room, and who now stood knocking and calling for admission. A great deal of curiosity, and a little anxiety for Agnes's safety, had brought her to see what was going on, and when she saw Agnes she tried to find out what she had been doing, or what had induced her to visit "the ne'er-do-weel Davie Rattrie, an' his nateral o' a sister." But Agnes, disliking her appearance, evaded her curiosity and hastened away.

After this Agnes paid many visits to the poor idiot. Sometimes she took her bright flowers, or scraps of gay-coloured silks and paper, which served poor Madge for amusement during a whole day, and longer, if she did not lose them. At other times she carried her little dainties, her own share of yesterday's pudding or tart, sugar-plums which had been given her, or a piece of cake, or of bread and jelly, which Mrs Gordon allowed her to take. The boys, too, were very ready to deny themselves, and send to Madge a share of any sweetmeat which came in their way. And even little Blanche and

Ned often brought Agnes a sugar-plum, or barley-sugar drop, from those Mrs Morgan delighted to give them, and begged her to take it to the poor little girl who had no sense. Once when Davie had told Agnes in the morning that Madge had taken one of her cross, restless fits, she took up her musical box, and set it playing close to the poor child's ear. Madge could not follow the tune, or understand the sweetness of the tones ; but insensibly the music soothed her excited nerves, she became quiet, and after a little fell asleep. And Agnes seeing this, got into the habit of singing to her, whenever she found her thus restless and suffering, and generally with success.

One day she was more than usually uncomfortable and irritable, and every effort to quiet her having failed, Davie, who had shown extraordinary patience and tenderness, said mournfully—

“I ken what she wants. Jist to get out, puir thing. But hoo to tak her I dinna ken. The bairns tease her, an’ I canna leave her to thrash them, for she’s no fit to stand alone.”

“Suppose I were to go with you,” Agnes said. “I don’t think,” with a little assumption of dignity, “that they will tease her if I am with you.”

And so they went out together, the poor idiot between Agnes and Davie. At first, as Agnes had expected, the children they met only stared at them in silence. They were too much astonished to see a young lady like Agnes walk hand in hand with daft Madge to think of anything else. But this did not last long. Soon

they began to crowd after her and to tease her as of old, now dancing round in front to point and laugh at her, mocking her poor hobbling gait and drooping head, now coming slyly up behind to give her little pulls and pushes, and crying out, "Hey, daft Madge. How's daft Madge? What will ye tak for yer wits, Madge?" and such like witticisms.

Poor Madge had not enough of intelligence to be angered by their insults, as idiots sometimes are. But they burned deep into her brother's heart. As he could not leave his companions to punish her enemies, and as they took good care to keep out of reach of his ready hand and foot, he did not expose himself to their mockery by useless threats. But he stored up vengeance in his heart, and resolved to make them feel the weight of his anger at another time. In spite of his dogged silence, Agnes read in his flushed cheek and fiery glances how much he felt, and for his sake she resolved to try to disperse the little crowd. Stopping suddenly, she faced round upon them, and said gravely, though pleasantly—

"I am sure that you don't think of what you are doing, or you would not do it. Is it not God who has made you different from poor Madge, who has given you your senses? Will not He be angry when He sees you make it worse for her than it need be?"

Surprise kept them silent for a minute. And gathering courage, Agnes went on—

"I can tell you, girls, that it is pleasant to try to please her and make her happy—a great deal more pleasant than to tease her as you do. And as for you, boys,

my brothers would tell you that it is mean and cowardly to tease a poor helpless girl. A brave boy tries to help and protect the weak and the girls."

The children looked at each other, whispered, tried to laugh, and to shrug their shoulders. But an impression had been made. Slowly they opened their ranks, and allowed Agnes and her two companions to pass on unmolested. Surprise might have a good deal to do with this impression, but a little conviction and a little shame were there also. Had Madge come among them on the following day, a crowd might have gathered round her again to laugh and torment; but it would not have been so large a one as before. Several, a good many, of the better-natured children were really touched by Agnes's appeal, and could never again join with easy consciences in such a cruel game.

From this day Agnes's conquest of Davie was complete, her influence over him unbounded. It was her influence, indeed, which induced him to receive the friendly advances of the boys in the spirit in which they were made. He was more suspicious of the boys than he had been of Agnes, more warlike in his feelings towards them. Besides, he liked the fun of spiting them, of inventing impudent speeches, of playing mischievous tricks. He was not altogether willing to give up this amusement. But when he found how earnestly Agnes desired a reconciliation, and how much she grieved over every act of enmity, he laid a constraint upon himself, condescended to accept their offers of amity, and tried hard to like them for her sake.

Soon this trying was not necessary. The boys were as ready to be kind to Madge as Agnes was, and kindness to her was the surest way to her brother's favour. Lionel won his heart at one stroke, literally at one blow, by knocking down a boy much stronger than himself whom he found tormenting her. And Malcolm's gay, easy temper, and Cecil's gentleness, were fitted to make their way with any boy. Davie soon found, too, that it was, as Agnes had said, more pleasant to feel kindly towards others, and that it was as amusing to help as to hinder the boys in their works. Little tiffs and disputes arose from time to time, as might have been expected; but, upon the whole, peace was wonderfully well kept among them.

With Agnes there were no tiffs, with her Davie never quarrelled. He looked upon her as a creature of a superior order, and was ready to do anything, to suffer anything, to serve her. For her sake he was willing to bear with Lionel's imperiousness, or with Malcolm's gay teasing. And it was for her sake that he did so much to help the boys in filling up their wild-flower borders, because he knew that Agnes had that scheme greatly at heart.

Well had the scheme prospered with his ready aid—well were the borders filled. Suckers of honeysuckle, wild roses, and sweetbriar were planted all along by the paling which they were intended to cover over and conceal. Under their shelter were beds of the white and blue periwinkles, and farther forward were cowslips, primroses, wood hyacinths, and such common spring flowers, with

the larger and smaller celandine, several kinds of orchis, and St John's wort, some of the prettiest of the ranunculus tribe, and many others which I can neither remember nor take time to name. To the children's extreme gratification Davie brought them some roots of the lovely grass of Parnassus, and some rare bog plants from a wild spot among the hills nearly seven miles away. They did not thrive very well. Lionel said that they missed the wild mountain breezes, and considered it beneath their dignity to flower in borders round a washing-green. But the children's gratitude to Davie was not the less hearty for the trouble he had taken to please them.

The borders were indeed greatly indebted to Davie. Strong in body, active, light of foot, and knowing every inch of ground for miles round, he was a most valuable assistant. He was able to lead them to many quiet nooks among the hills which they might never have found for themselves, and was ready to search hill and dale, wood and field, for their service, to get what they wished for.

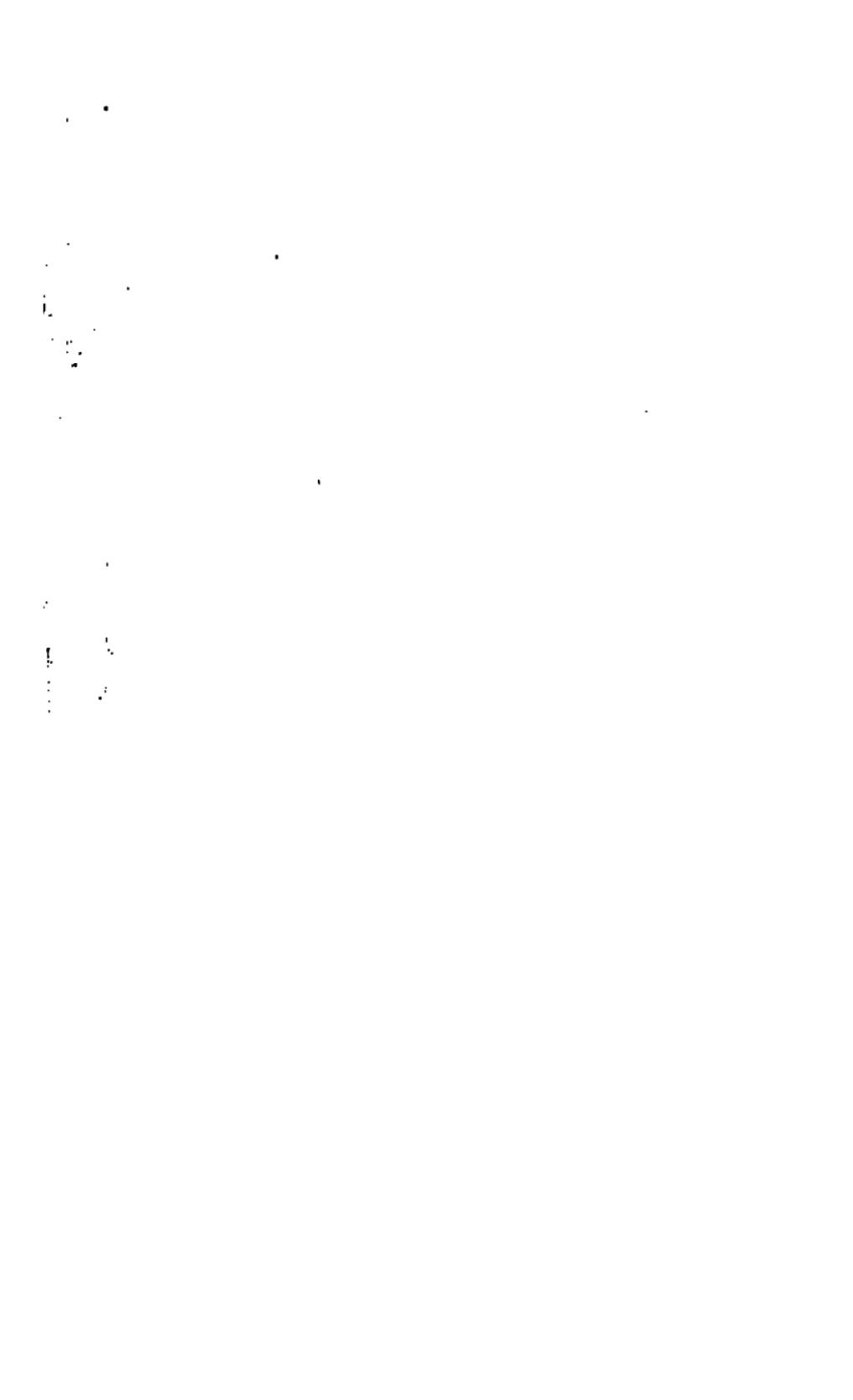
One day he brought Agnes something carefully covered up in a little rude, unshapely basket of his own manufacture. So soon as he had put it into her hands he ran away in a most unusual fit of shyness; but not so fast did he escape as not to hear her cry of joy when she unfastened the covering, her eager, delighted—

“A Woodsia fern! O mamma, only see how beautiful!”

The Woodsia fern, as perhaps my readers know, is

very rare. Often has a guinea been given for a plant of it. It grows near the summit of one of the highest mountains to the north of Knock Earn. Its only known dwelling-place there, is a platform which one can reach only by being lowered from the rocks above. Davie knew of the existence of the fern, and of its abode, as indeed did most of the inhabitants of Knock Earn, its high price making it an object of search to the poorer people, who might not otherwise have cared for it. Poor Davie had no one to help him to reach the well-known platform ; but by diligent search, and hazardous climbing, he found two or three plants growing in a corner, which no one else had ever discovered, and he seized upon them for his beloved Miss Agnes. Well was he rewarded for his toil, and for the danger he had run, by her hearty thanks as she gave him back the basket, and by the sparkling eyes and cheeks flushed with pleasure, which showed how sincere those thanks were, how great was the delight he had provided for her.

At another time Davie was missing for two days and a night. No one knew where he was gone ; and his young friends were very uneasy about him. Late in the evening of the second day, a message was brought to Agnes that he was down-stairs, and wished to speak to her. Again was the rude basket in his hand, this time containing a most beautiful little tortoise-shell kitten. Davie had heard of a farmer's wife who had a very rare breed of tortoise-shell cats. The place was twenty miles away ; but Davie, urged by affection and gratitude, set off on foot to get one of these famous kittens for his young





Davie requests the farmer's wife to give him a kitten. P. 274.



pretty creature, graceful and amusing as all kittens are, and although a little capricious in temper, as is generally the case with pretty, petted cats, she was, on the whole, affectionate and very engaging. And then, in addition to her own merits, she was, as you may believe, very dear to Agnes as a token of poor Davie's gratitude and kindness.

Something of this kind Agnes said to her father one day when he found her admiringly watching her favourite making her way through a saucerful of milk, and when he rallied her a little upon her excessive attachment for her new plaything.

"She is very pretty to be sure," Agnes said. "But I like her most because she always reminds me of Davie's goodness in taking so much trouble to get her. O papa, I am so glad that he is so grateful and kind."

"I can believe you are. It is right you should be," he answered. "And indeed, Agnes, Davie does you great credit. When I first saw him, so hard, so insolent, I never expected that you should be able to soften his feelings and subdue his temper so soon."

"Oh," Agnes answered, eagerly, "from the moment that I saw his gentleness to poor Madge, and his love for her, I was sure that he had good in him. I was sure that it would come out."

"And your confidence in him, your patience with him, have been rewarded," Mr Gordon said again. "You know I do not think too much praise good for young people; but I must say that you and the boys have been very patient."

"We don't deserve much praise, papa," she said, earnestly. "When once we saw how poor Davie was left, with no one to care for him, no one to be kind to him, we could not help pitying him, and being very anxious to help him. And then it made us very happy to do it. It has been very pleasant, papa, to find so many little ways of giving pleasure to poor Madge, of making little blinks of sunshine for her."

"I can believe it, my dear, I can well believe it," he said.

"And I think, papa, at least I hope," Agnes pursued, "that we have not used mamma's idea of the sunshine in a wrong way. We often speak about it, and remind each other that we must seek to take up a little bit of Davie and Madge's heavy burden, because God has commanded us to do it. But, then, when we have got that for our reason, the thought of sunshine often helps us to find the way to do it."

"As how, my dear?" he asked.

"Why, you know, papa, sometimes when I have only an end of ribbon, or a morsel of cake to take to Madge, and have not more than a minute to stay with her, have not time to do more than say a word or two, or give her a nod, or smile, it seems hardly worth while to go up the hill for so little good. But then, when I recollect about the sunshine, I say to myself, 'Well, never mind how little it may be, it is always a peep of sunshine for her, and it is all you have to give.' And then I am ready to go at once."

"Very good, my dear," Mr Gordon said, encourag-

ingly. "If we have no way or time to give our neighbour more, we can always give him at least a kind word or a pleasant smile."

While Mr and Mrs Gordon had left to their children the task of softening poor Davie's heart, they were stirring themselves to serve him in other ways, and had been inquiring into the condition of the orphans. They found that the room they inhabited had been the mother's, that the few miserable articles of furniture had been hers also. As the brother and sister were unable to maintain themselves, the parish paid for their board and lodging a small weekly sum to Mrs Gow, the woman at the other end of the house. She was bound to take them into her room; but Davie would not give up his liberty, would not allow Madge to be where he knew she would be pushed about, and teased, if not more directly ill-used. He chose to stay on in their room, for which they paid no rent, as it was too miserable to be taken by any other person had they left it; and Mrs Gow, selfish, and with little principle, well pleased to have as little trouble about them as possible, allowed him to manage as he chose, or could. In the long warm summer days they got on pretty well; but in winter they suffered a great deal. Of course, they had no money to buy fuel, nothing with which to make a fire, except such sticks as Davie could get in the woods; and as he was neither provident enough nor industrious enough to lay up a store in summer, that supply was sufficiently scanty and precarious. Their room, with its broken window and cracked walls, was terribly cold,

and many a winter's night had the two orphans shivered through in each other's arms under the straw which supplied the place of blankets. The sum furnished by the parish was very small, and as Mrs Gow's only thought was to make the most out of it for herself, you may suppose that the poor orphans had but scanty fare, eked out, as it was, with what Davie could earn by running messages now and then for people at the inn, by begging, and, I am afraid, by stealing when he could.

Madge's condition first engaged Mr and Mrs Gordon's care. There are institutions for such poor creatures as her, where their health is cared for, and where their intellect receives such culture as it can take in. Mr Gordon had many rich friends, and by applying to them he succeeded in raising a sum sufficient, with what the parish agreed to give, to pay for her board in such an asylum for five years ; while Mrs Gordon and Agnes, with occasional help from the servants, worked hard to get her decently and comfortably clothed.

This was not all that Agnes had to do in the business. To her share it fell to reconcile Davie to parting from his sister. Many hours had she to give to him, talking the matter over with him, listening patiently to his objections, drawing brilliant pictures of the comfort Madge would enjoy, and the benefit she would receive ; hunting out every book upon the subject she could find, and telling him, or reading to him, of cases where extraordinary benefit had resulted from the treatment adopted in these institutions, and the astonishing cures which had been effected.

When Madge had been sent away, Davie's case came next to be considered. To leave him with a woman like Mrs Gow, who irritated his temper and excited all his worst feelings, was not to be thought of ; and besides, it was time that he should learn to work for his own support. The children laid a fine scheme of persuading their papa to engage him as their own errand-boy and gardener ; and Lionel and Malcolm undertook to give him all necessary instruction and help, so that no other gardener should be required. What they did not as yet know, they could learn from gardening-books ; and they were willing to take any amount of trouble for his sake.

But their father and mother could not approve of the plan. Although much softened and greatly improved, Davie was still a rude, rough boy, no very good companion for Lionel or Malcolm, still less so for the younger boys. He had a strong affection, but no respect for his young masters ; and such a state of matters could not be good for either him or them. Besides, although for her sake he listened patiently when Agnes tried to teach him about his God and Saviour, she had not as yet made much impression, and had totally failed to convince him of the sin of swearing. To please her, in his calmer moments he abstained from oaths ; but in excitement, in difficulty, or in anger, they poured forth in a manner to make him a most undesirable associate for either boys or girls.

But how otherwise to dispose of him, became a difficult question. They could not send him to any one who would not be kind to him, take care of him, watch

over and instruct him. From this difficulty they were relieved by John Campbell of Ferncairn, good friend in time of need. He came in to tell Mr Gordon that his friend, the ploughman, had got his claims to relationship acknowledged by the present head of the family. That gentleman had told him that there was another and nearer heir, but he had behaved very handsomely to his humble relative, and had settled upon him such a sum as would, Campbell said, make him happier as a ploughman or small farmer, than he could have been as an idle gentleman of fortune. This, however, is a digression; the subject in hand was David Rattray and his prospects. As Mr Gordon's mind was at the time full of him, he told his history to Campbell, found that he was looking out for such a lad to run errands, and do some of the lighter work of the farm, and had not already engaged one, only because he wished to find a boy whom it would be real charity to take. The matter was speedily settled. Mr Gordon was glad to get Davie to a distance from all his former idle companions, and Davie was himself willing to go. Again the females of the house were required to use their needles diligently to get him a decent suit of clothes, and in little more than a week he was fairly established at Ferncairn.

Here he did remarkably well. I have said that he was quick-witted and intelligent. When he chose, he could both understand and work better and quicker than most boys of his age. In the present case, he did so choose; at first only for the Gordons' sake, that they might have the pleasure of hearing of his well-doing.

But soon the Campbells, by their unwearying kindness, won their own way into his warm heart ; and he gave himself to their service with all his might, using all his quickness and cleverness of mind, all his strength and activity of body, for their good, ready, as the saying is, to go through fire and water to serve them, and finding steady industry and regularity, which might have been so irksome to a lad of his habits, easy and pleasant, because it was for their sake that he was industrious and regular. He became, as John Campbell said, a thoroughly valuable, clever, trusty servant, one who, working for his master's good, and for no praise or reward, might be trusted to do his duty at all times, whether his doing of it could be known or not ; and in after years, when he had given to his God in heaven that love and devotedness which he had always so freely poured out upon his few earthly friends, he became a most shining Christian, remarkable for untiring zeal in his Master's cause, for earnest efforts for the souls of others. Never to his dying day did he forget what he owed to the Gordons, above all to Agnes ; never, as he said, could he cease to think of the little hand which had been so earnestly stretched out to draw him from the edge of the fearful pit where she had found him standing. Had she left him alone for another year, or half-year, he said, so hard was he becoming, that his salvation might have become impossible ; and he often used his own case to stir up others to be up and doing at once, whatever their hands found to do, whether success seemed probable or not.

Means were found to keep Madge seven years at the asylum. As far as intellect was concerned, she was not a hopeful case. But her bodily health improved greatly; and, as is often the case with the imbecile, all the intellect she had showed itself in reference to religion. She learned to know and love her God and Saviour, came to understand the great and simple truths of the gospel, not by human reason, but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, and enjoyed a single-hearted, unwavering faith, which many of the wise and learned never attain.

Before she left the asylum, Davie had means sufficient to make a comfortable home for her, and to pay a good, motherly old woman to attend to her. And when in after years he married, and had a family, Madge and her good, kind attendant were comfortably established in a house by themselves. Truly the two Rattrays were never anything but a comfort to their kind friends. The sunshine they had been able to make for the poor orphans, came back in tenfold brightness to their own hearts.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHILDREN INTERFERE WITH BELL'S SUNSHINE.

THE summer months passed pleasantly and quickly away. Lionel had told Colin to put off his grumblings over their small variety of occupations and amusements, until they should be quite tired of what they had. And that time never came. There was now so much to do for themselves, which they had been accustomed to get done for them by others. The small domain of Sunny Brae was so much more their own property than had been the larger one of Eagle's Crag, so much more dependent for improvement upon their exertions, that they were never at a loss for work. To-day the precious cauliflowers had to be earthed up, to-morrow the gravel walks required weeding. Now they had to nail up the straggling branches of the cherry-tree on the wall, and again had the delightful task of finding room for, and planting out, an enchanting present of geraniums and verbenas, which had been sent to them by the gardener at St Michael's; while the whole days of the Saturday or other holidays were devoted to long

rambles over the country, in search of wild flowers, the evenings to the unpacking and disposing of the treasures thus obtained.

Besides these more habitual occupations, stray plans were constantly arising to be worked out for the comfort and pleasure of themselves, of their parents, or of their pets of different sorts. One of the most important of these was the conversion of the coach-house into a play-room. The only real inconvenience to the children, in the smallness of their new house, had been in the absence of space to romp in on rainy days. There was no room set apart for the purpose, none large enough to be of much use. And their mother did not like them to run about on the stairs or through the passages, both because these same stairs were by no means very safe for racing, thoughtless passengers, and because she feared their noise might disturb Mr Gordon in the study.

It was, therefore, a grand and joyfully-received suggestion of Lionel's, that they should make the coach-house their play-room. It was a large, lofty place, ridiculously large for the size of the domain. There was ample space for their games and works. But the glass in the window was completely gone, and a large piece having been broken out from the bottom of the door, freer admission was given to wet and cold than was altogether suitable. The door was soon patched up by the big boys ; but the window was more troublesome. The elder children had, from the very beginning, seen the necessity of saving their parents all unnecessary expense, and never thought of asking that the glazier should be

sent for. But their father had told them that he had, in his young days, been a glazier as well as a paperhanger. To him they went to ask if he could show them how to mend the window. Of course he could, he said, and had the glazier's diamond pencil and square all ready. Panes of glass and a little putty were alone required.

Lionel and Malcolm went to ask the price of as many panes as were wanted. It far exceeded the small sum belonging to them. They thought the plan must be given up, when Davie came to their aid.

“Where was the need for good panes of glass?” he said; “could not they patch up the window with odd bits and corners, which they could get cheap?” Often, poor fellow, had he tried the patching plan, when paper or cloth had been more plenty than glass, and where gum, gathered off the wild cherry-trees, had supplied the place of putty.

With Davie's help, the children discovered a treasure of broken glass which had been thrown out and swept into a corner, when a good many cracked and broken panes had been replaced with perfect ones, at the time that Sunny Brae had been preparing for the Gordon family. With these fragments, three-fourths of the window were filled up, and for the remaining fourth the glazier sold them similar odd pieces and corners for a small sum. So a very serviceable, light-giving, if not very handsome window, was in due course of time manufactured.

In the coach-house thus repaired, all the play materials of the family were stored up. The fishing-rods,

sticks, bats, balls, and wickets of the boys, and the playthings of the children, which Mary gladly gave up, that she might get the space they had occupied for more important purposes. Here, too, were various grand treasures—gifts which kind Mr Douglas sent to his young friends soon after his visit to Sunny Brae. A magnificent chest of carpenter's tools for the four big boys, a large rocking-horse for Ned, a waggon and cart, nearly as large as himself, for Willie, and such a doll's cradle for Blanche, with a doll to lie in it, and a chest of drawers in which to keep her ladyship's clothes.

Here, on rainy days, might the whole young part of the family be found. The boys sawing, chiselling, planing, hammering, gluing, varnishing, with all the grave, earnest diligence of regular carpenters; the children riding to India to see Uncle Malcolm, carrying parcels for papa to London, and dressing and undressing Mrs Dolly, through an endless succession of wonderfully short days and nights; while Agnes sometimes helped the boys at their work, sometimes the children at play, and might sometimes be found perched, Turkish fashion, her feet under her, on a high shelf, devouring a new book, above the reach of interrupters, old or young.

Here, too, might often be seen Mrs Davie, with her constant companion and playfellow, Mr Douglas's puppy, which came home to Sunny Brae a day or two after herself, and was very much her own age. On account of certain puppy-like tearing and tumbling about propensities, the children called this young gentleman Worry. He promised to be as handsome in his way as Davie was

in hers. But as dogs do not come to perfection so soon as cats, he was still rather rough and shapeless. He was, however, an engaging little fellow, lively, affectionate, and with as much character and sense of humour as the children could desire.

At first Davie was inclined to set up her back, to spit and fuff at the new comer. But very soon, so soon, Malcolm averred, as they had found that they were by far the youngest and wildest members of the household, they saw the expediency of laying aside enmity for the sake of mutual companionship and assistance in matters of business and pleasure, and of entering into an alliance offensive and defensive, against all intruders, biped or quadruped, on their domains or privileges. A close friendship it speedily became. They were seldom apart for a moment of the day or night. Often might they be found sleeping in the sun, or before the fire, Worry's head upon Davie's back, or Davie curled up in a ball against Worry's rough breast. Every new and strange object was gravely inspected in company, and each was ready to defend the other, in whatever danger occurred. Did a strange footstep along the flagged path under the windows call the watchful Worry out to inquire into the visitor's intentions or respectability, instantly did Davie dart out after her friend, ready to give battle with teeth and claws in his defence. And when Worry happened to be in the sitting-room, or in the boys' bed-room without her, and her voice came through the open window, spitting or growling at a strange cat which had dared to stare at her, he would start to his feet in a moment,

tumble down-stairs with reckless haste, and dash gallantly out to the rescue.

These were the more serious consequences of their alliance, but not less did it extend to play than to combat and defence. Their gambols were the amusement of the whole household. Many a half-hour on the hot summer days did the children spend under the trees of the orchard, watching the two as they chased each other in giddy circles, darted out and in among the trees at hide-and-seek, tumbled over each other, tumbled over themselves, bit, scratched, quarrelled, and made friends again, with untiring perseverance. And even Mr Gordon, busy student and author as he was, often found time to stand to admire their grace, and laugh at the grave intentness with which they pursued their games. Certainly Davie and Worry were a constant source of interest and amusement to all.

This amusement, and the others I have mentioned, were harmless, some of them profitable. But not so much could be said of one in which they too frequently indulged, namely, teasing and laughing at poor Bell, interfering with her sunshine, as Mr Gordon called it. Bell was in some ways a laughter-provoking subject. She was a most excellent woman, a most valuable servant, devotedly attached to her master and mistress, and to every one of their family, earnest to serve them, careful of their property as if it had been her own, and only too jealous of their reputation. In her own department she was nearly perfect. A better housemaid or laundry-maid it would be difficult to find. She kept the glass

and china, the silver and knives, as bright and free from scratch as Pearson himself could have done, and blacked the boots and shoes, and polished the mahogany tables as well as heart could wish.

But when it came to personal attendance, matters were very different. In waiting at table, in delivering messages, or ushering in visitors, she was assuredly uncouth and awkward. And her extreme anxiety to do perfectly right only made her more awkward still. Nothing could check the children's diversion at her mistakes. They delighted to lay snares for her, to startle her, or distract her attention when she was placing a dish before her master or mistress, that they might enjoy her look of consternation when she spilt gravy or upset glass or tumbler. With innocent, unconscious faces they asked civilly for bread or water at the moment when she was doing something else, in order to betray her into throwing down the plate she was holding to Mr Gordon for a fresh supply of meat, or into recklessly placing the vegetables she was handing round, upon chair or floor, or a corner of the dinner table. They were often checked for their unreasonable demands; but as Mrs Gordon did not suspect that they were made upon system, her reproofs were too slight to make much impression.

Another unfailing source of amusement was to watch Bell introduce visitors into the sitting-room. They used to lie upon the stairs, their heads cautiously raised to view the whole scene, to watch poor Bell's agony of doubt as to whether it was most proper and genteel to shut the front door behind the company, or to go before

them at once to the sitting-room ; the wavering of her bulky person in the small lobby, as now the one, and now the other conviction prevailed ; and the final frantic rush past the guests as she concluded, which she invariably did, that the choice she had made was the wrong one.

Poor Bell ! She and Nelly, in their kitchen, often rejoiced over the fact that all the great county families who had visited at Eagle's Crag, had made a point of calling as soon as possible at Sunny Brae. But the visits, which were matter of rejoicing when they were over, were a great grief, a sore trial to Bell while they were enacting, from the constant doubts as to what she ought to do, constant fears that she had done wrong, constant certainty that she was a most uncouth, clumsy table-maid. At such times she was tormented with the suspicion that she had acted selfishly in persuading her mistress to keep her, and was beset with feelings of envy of Mary for her pretty face, her smart figure, light step, and self-possessed manners. Not in the smallest degree for her own sake, did she thus fear and envy. She did not care in the least what might be thought of her, and was perfectly content to be broad-faced and clumsy to the end of her days. But that her dear mistress should not have a nice-looking, personable, smart table-maid to open the door for her and wait at table as other people had, was intolerable. The real depth of her annoyance was not suspected by the children, or perhaps its manifestation might not have amused them as much as it did.

One day about the beginning of August, when the two

servants were in the washing-green hanging out clothes, the older children rushed down the garden, crying out, with mischievous glee—

“Bell, Bell, there is the St Michael’s carriage coming up the road. Depend upon it, it is coming here. No carriage ever comes up that road except to come here.”

Bell turned very red, but she resolutely shook out the table-cloth she was going to hang up, declaring that she did not believe them. A loud ring at the door bell, an unmistakable footman’s ring, checked the words on her lips. The children shouted in triumph. Bell dropped the table-cloth, and looked despairingly at her fellow-servant.

“O Nelly, woman! What am I to do now? An’ me siccan a figure! What ever tempted me to pit on this auld dud!” and she looked ruefully down upon her faded, well-patched wrapper which had been put on that morning as most fit for the washing-tub work before her, and which, in too rude contact with that same elegant article of furniture, had got itself adorned with sundry patches and splashes of wet and soap.

“Touts, woman! never heed,” said the more philosophical Nelly; “what’s done canna be undone, what canna be cured maun be endured. Gang yer ways up to the hoose, like a woman, and open the door to her leddyship. An’ pit on yer fine cap an’ apron if ye like. They’ll aye set ye up a bit.”

As there was really no remedy, Bell followed the advice given, and hastened to the house. A second ring

drove her nearly frantic, as she was in the act of changing her cap and apron, and she was obliged to run up-stairs without even a glance at the looking-glass. Poor Bell! she had not improved her appearance. The fine cap and apron had been bought in a moment of folly, with the desperate hope of making herself look smart, as a table-maid should be, and without the least thought as to how they might suit her large face and bulky figure. Now the one hastily tied on above her hair, which, though smooth and glossy, had been pushed tight back to keep out of her way while washing ; and the other over an old, tumbled morning wrapper, they could not be said to add greatly to her respectability or tidiness. The children were in fits of smothered, suffocating laughter as they watched her dash hastily, flushed and troubled, up-stairs. The actual ushering in of the visitors was not difficult. Lord and Lady Colville, quiet and simple as true aristocrats, were less formidable than had been the gay, be-flowered, beflounced daughters of a London merchant who had called the day before, and driven Bell nearly out of her senses by their airs and graces, and by the difficulty she had had in catching the name from their Cockney tongues, and in getting her own Scotch one to pronounce it. In the present case she thought that she got pretty well through the business, and she went down-stairs tolerably satisfied with herself.

At the foot of the stairs, however, her little tormentors were waiting for her, and opened upon her immediately.

“ Well, Bell, and what did Lord Colville say to the lovely pink ribbons ? ” asked one.

“And the apron,” added Agnes; “did Lady Colville not ask for the pattern?”

Bell deigned no reply, but passing them, stalked into the kitchen. The children followed. She began to bustle about, putting back chairs, laying aside dishes, lifting pots off the fire for no other purpose than to put them on again, unless to show the children how little she heeded them.

“And did Lord Colville really not observe the pink ribbons?” Malcolm asked, in a tone of affected pity.

“Nor the footman! Did the gay footman not admire you, Bell?” asked another.

Still Bell deigned no reply.

“But are they driving that splendid young horse that they had at Eagle’s Crag at Christmas? What colours were the horses, Bell? Was one a gray?” Malcolm asked, with real interest.

Bell did not know. She had other things to think of than horses.

“Of course you had,” said Agnes; “you had to think of your cap and apron, and of how to show them off to best advantage. But see, boys,” interrupting herself as the carriage, which had been turning, came into view, “there is that beauty horse.”

“So it is,” cried Lionel; “come, Malcolm, let us go and see him.”

“Indeed, ye’ll do no sic thing,” cried Bell, roused to attention, “and you sic figures wi’ diggin’ in the borders and climbing the trees.”

“Won’t we?” they cried, laughing and running off.

Agnes looked wistfully after them. Well should she have liked to have made one of the party ; but, boy-like as in many respects she was, she had a certain sense of propriety which told her that it would not be seemly in a young lady to converse familiarly with strange menservants, as she knew the boys would do. So wishing discontentedly that she were a boy, she returned to the kitchen window to watch their shy advances towards intimacy, first with the horse, and then with his driver, to envy them the privilege of patting and caressing the beautiful creature, to admire the proud arching of his neck, as if he knew what was said of him, and his impatient pawing of the ground. A very fine stag-hound, which had accompanied the carriage, came next upon the field, and Agnes felt still more discontented and envious as she saw the boys making friends with him, and knew by the faces of both speakers and listeners, by the merry little bursts of laughter, and by the eager exclamations which reached her ears, that the servants were telling interesting and amusing stories of the dog and of his kindred.

“I wish, oh, how I wish I were a boy!” she sighed.

At this moment the sitting-room door was heard to open, and Mrs Gordon’s step was heard on the stair.

“Mamma has come down to tell papa that Lord Colville is here,” she remarked. “You should have done that, Bell.”

“I was not told,” said Bell, stiffly, “and I was not going to disturb my master for any lord in the land, without being told.”

Agnes meant to run out to meet her mamma, to ascertain if her conjecture had been correct, but just then Worry found out his young masters, and in the amusement of watching his impertinencies to the large dog, and the other's lofty disregard of them, she thought of nothing else. After a little, dogs and boys moved out of her sight, and she had time to feel discontented again, and impatient for the departure of the visitors. Bell was impatient also, as she wished to get back to the washing-green.

At last the sitting-room door was again heard to open. There was a sound of voices in the lobby.

“Why, they are going,” cried Agnes, “and without ringing for you to open the door. What a breach of etiquette! Mamma must have been afraid that they might be quite overwhelmed by a second sight of that splendid cap.”

She ran to the foot of the stairs to listen, and met the boys rushing, breathless and laughing, round by the garden, half ashamed and half amused at having been caught.

“We counted on having the bell for a warning,” cried Malcolm, “and so making our escape, when, lo and behold! in a moment when we were never thinking of them, the door opened and out they came, and we had to rush past them all to get away.”

“Oh, and you such figures,” cried Agnes, shocked.

In truth, they could not boast of great elegance or propriety of dress. Their hard work as gardeners and carpenters did not tend to the improvement or durability

of their clothes, and of course new garments were not now so easily come by as they had been. Sundry patches were upon trousers and jackets. They had been that afternoon digging up a border for work, climbing trees for diversion, and both occupations had left their marks upon hands and clothes.

“Bother, never mind whether we were figures or not,” said Lionel. “But oh! Agnes, such a horse. Such a beautiful head, such a magnificent chest, and such an eye! You never saw anything like him.”

At this moment Mr Gordon came down-stairs, and the boys asked him where their mamma was going. They had seen her come out with Lady Colville, dressed to go out.

“She is going to Glendale and some other places with the Colvilles. So see that you keep out of mischief till she comes back,” he said, passing into his room.

To keep out of mischief was the very thing they were least inclined to do. After a hearty discussion of the beauties of horse and stag-hound, they all followed Bell to the washing-green, and recommenced their teasing and banter.

“O Nelly,” cried Malcolm, in affected ecstasy, “you can’t think how bewitching were the cap and apron. What a pity that you were not there to see them!”

“But it was in connexion with that lovely wrapper that they were so beautiful,” put in Agnes. “By themselves they would not have been half so striking.”

“Oh, lovely wrapper indeed,” said one of the twins;

“why do you not oftener treat us with a sight of it?
Such a beauty as it is! Such a fine pale colour!”

“And such variety,” added Malcolm, taking hold of the skirt and holding it out so as to display a large patch of new cloth in all the brightness of the original deep purple. “Such striking contrasts of shade!”

“Please to leave my wrapper alone, Master Malcolm,” she said, loftily.

“Did you know, boys,” pursued Agnes, “that the cap, apron, and wrapper are all insignia of the noble order of the washing-tub to which Bell belongs?”

“The wrapper, but not the cap and apron,” replied Malcolm. “They belong to the most noble and most honourable order of the dinner-tray. Now, don’t they, Bell?”

“I know this,” said Bell, at last provoked out of her dignified silence, “that it is impossible to get on with our work while you children are here. An’ so ye’ll jist please to walk out o’ the green, one an’ all o’ ye.”

“Oh, indeed, we please to do so, do we? Are you sure?” cried Colin, dancing in front of her, as if to provoke her to catch him.

She made a sudden effort to do so. He ran off. Bell imprudently followed. Cecil darted in between them. She turned upon him, but was in a similar manner diverted from her prey by Agnes. The game now began in earnest. The children darted round her, now on this side, now on that, now before, now behind, laughing, whooping, hallooing. Poor Bell, she was completely baffled. They were too many, too quick for

her. At this instant the whole five were round her almost within reach of her hand. At the next they had darted under the lines of clothes, were out of sight, and a wet sheet flapping in her face was the only reward for her vigorous spring after them. Nelly's assistance was not much worth. Her temper was by nature much softer than Bell's, and besides she had not been provoked as Bell had been. She tried to help her fellow-servant, but she could not help being amused by the children's cleverness and invariable success; and when Worry joined in the chase, and taking his young masters' part, ran barking at Bell's heels, catching her gown in his teeth, Nelly could not resist a good laugh.

"Better leave them alone," she advised. "They'll tire some time, and ye'll never lay hands upon sich will-o'-the-wisps."

And Bell, seeing the wisdom of the advice, returned sullenly to her work, muttering that she should tell Mrs Gordon how ill they had behaved the moment she came home.

The children stood still to rest and gather breath, for to run and laugh at the same time make pretty fatiguing work. Cecil, who was more easily tired than the others, and who had some conscientious doubts as to the propriety of teasing Bell so much, left the washing-green for the orchard, that he might seek a pleasant shady seat where to enjoy the book he had all this time carried in his pocket; but the rest soon gathered again round their prey. Agnes was the first to recommence the bantering, teasing process.

"Well," she said with great gravity, "is not there a mantle also among the insignia of the order of the washing-tub? See here!" and snatching up a sheet which, being dry, Nelly had taken down from the lines and laid in the basket, she threw the one end over her shoulder, and stalked over the green, the sheet trailing on the ground behind.

"Did ever onybody see siccan a bairn!" cried poor Nelly, catching hold of her. "Miss Agnes, are ye fair daft? Did ye think that the claithes are washed jist that ye may trail them in the dirt?"

Agnes laughingly allowed herself to be dispossessed of her flowing mantle; but the infection had spread. Malcolm caught up a shirt of his father's, and was proceeding to tie it round his neck by the sleeves, when Bell rescued it from his grasp.

"I tell ye I'll stand this no longer," she said, fairly in a passion. "Get out o' the green this very minute, every one o' ye, or I'll go straight up and tell my maister what ye're at."

"Of course, we are going this very minute," coolly returned Lionel. "Look here, Bell," and springing lightly over a heaped-up basket of clothes, he dived under the lines, ran round, and was back in a minute to repeat the feat.

Of course the others followed, leaping, dashing through the clothes, running round and back to leap again in reckless glee. In vain Bell repeated her threat to complain of them to their father. In vain Nelly entreated and remonstrated, and told them they were soiling the

wet clothes with their dirty hands, that they were loosening the ropes and shaking the poles that supported them. They did not hear, they did not heed. Staggering through laughter and giddiness, treading on each other's heels, stumbling over and kicking aside pins, clothes-basket, whatever came in their way, and catching at poles, sheets, or even one of the two angry women to steady themselves, round and round they ran, caring for nothing, thinking of nothing but the wild fun of the moment. Twice, thrice, four, five times, they made the circle in safety; but at the sixth, Lionel over-balancing himself in the leap, stumbled forward upon the line of hanging clothes before him, knocked away the supporting pole, and he and the clothes came to the ground together. The others, pretending not to see him, stumbled over him, Worry on the top of all, and boys, dog, and clothes tumbled about in one mass of confusion.

Even Nelly's patience could bear no more.

"Jist gang up an' bring the maister to them," she cried, angrily.

But Bell was already gone. Agnes, leaning, exhausted with laughter, against the fence, was the first to see that Bell had fulfilled her threat. In dismay she told the boys. Their noise ceased at once. They rose to their feet, looked after Bell and at each other.

"Who cares? What have we done?" cried Lionel, tossing back his head.

"She is a nasty cross patch," muttered Agnes.

"Cross patch, lift the latch, sit in the door and spin.

Telltale tit, your tongue shall be slit, and all the dogs in the town shall have a bit," sung out the boys loud enough for Bell to hear; but she did not care. She went steadily on her way, and returned in a minute or two to tell the children, with grim triumph, to go up to their father's study.

"Well, who cares?" again said Lionel; but he as well as the others went feeling and looking like culprits.

That as culprits Mr Gordon regarded them, was plainly to be seen by the severity of his aspect. Sternly rebuking them for their selfish disregard to the servants' feelings, he desired them instantly to apologise to Bell for the trouble they had given her, and to promise that for the future, when she required the washing-green, they should not enter it without her permission.

"Apologise to a servant! Ask her permission to enter our own washing-green!" cried Lionel, with flashing eyes. "A likely story that indeed."

"Do you mean that you do not intend to obey me?" Mr Gordon asked, looking fixedly at him.

The children had from very babyhood been so carefully trained in habits of unwavering respect and obedience, that even Lionel, proud as he was, man as he thought himself, could not make up his mind to defy his father to his face. He only threw back his head and stalked out of the room, without answer.

The others followed more quietly and humbly, and at once sought Bell to make the commanded apology. Colin did it a little sullenly, but Malcolm and Agnes with real heartiness. Their father's rebuke had con-

vinced them of their fault. They were truly sorry. More than graciously, even penitently, Bell received their overtures to reconciliation. From the moment that they left the green she had been tormented with remorse, for having complained of them.

"If their papa punishes them, if their mamma comes home to find them in disgrace," she said to Nelly, "how can I ever forgive myself? Why hadna I mair patience? Bairns will be bairns a' the wairld over."

So she would hardly suffer them to finish their request for forgiveness, so eager was she to apologise for her part. Her kindness and generosity increased the penitence of the two elders, awoke generosity and sorrow in Colin. They were all eager to atone. Malcolm returned to the grave business of digging the border which had occupied them in the early part of the day. It seemed a proper conclusion to the wild mischief of the afternoon. Agnes went to the house to take charge of the little ones, whose voices she heard, that Mary might be at liberty to prepare tea for the other servants; and Colin, with great zeal, if not great skill, devoted himself to do what he could to repair the damage they had done, to gather up the scattered pins, and to help to carry the heavy baskets to the house.

In the meantime Lionel stalked up and down the garden in a tumult of wild passion and pride.

He apologise to a servant, indeed! He should like to see himself! He promise not to enter the washing-green without her leave! Never, never, though a hundred fathers told him to do so.

This was the one side of the picture. But on the other was the obstinate, tormenting thought, that he had left his father to believe that he meant to obey him, and that not to do so without giving him warning was deceitful. Perfect truthfulness was one of the best parts of Lionel's natural character, and his pride and fearlessness made the virtue all the more natural, all the more easy to him. Deceit of word or deed he perfectly abhorred, and could not bear even the suspicion that he might be guilty of it.

Without allowing himself more time to think, he turned and marched haughtily into the green, and up to Bell.

“I suppose I must apologise because I have been told to do so,” he said, fiercely. “But remember, I don't do it the least for your sake. I think you an abominably impertinent, interfering old woman; and I can never be friends with you again,” and into the orchard he dashed without another word.

But not more at peace was his conscience than before. He could not deceive himself, could not suppose that his apology was anything but an insult, could not for a moment think that by it he had obeyed his father's command. Restless, angry, miserable, he paced up and down the orchard, until suddenly he came upon Cecil sitting at the root of a tree, quietly, peacefully reading his book. The calm, happy expression of his face stung Lionel to the quick. With something like a groan, he threw himself upon the grass beside him.

Cecil looked up with a smile, which vanished instantly at sight of Lionel's black thunder looks. He did not

like to speak, not even to ask what was wrong. Lionel lay upon his face, kicking impatiently with his feet, as if he would have kicked the whole world out of his way. He could not, he would not think. He did not wish to know what he ought to do. After a few minutes, with another groan he flung himself round upon his back, and began to tear up the grass by his side, throwing it from him with a vehemence of which he was not himself aware. The groan seemed to call upon Cecil to speak.

“Is anything wrong, Lionel?” he asked, anxiously.

“Anything? Everything is,” was the vehement answer. “And I don’t see how it is ever to be put right.”

Cecil was silent. From Lionel’s manner he guessed that it was he who was wrong, and after a little hesitation, he said, timidly—

“Don’t you think, Lionel, that God would help you to put it right if you asked Him?”

Lionel started as if stung by a wasp; flinging himself again round upon one side, he cried, passionately—

“But what if I don’t want to put it right? O Cecil,” with a sudden change of tone, “how could I ask anything from God with such horrible thoughts in my heart?”

His change of tone, the sudden saddening of his voice, encouraged Cecil.

“Dear Lionel,” he said, earnestly, “won’t God make you want to put it right? Won’t He take away the horrible thoughts?”

Lionel did not answer. But he buried his face in the grass, and lay for at least ten minutes quite still. When

he raised his face its expression was completely changed, grave, quiet, and resolved.

"I am going to try to put it right, Cecil," he said, in a low voice, and left him.

He went to the washing-green. The servants had left it. He followed them to the house. They were at tea, and Mary was with them. Her presence made his task more difficult, but did not shake his resolution. He walked straight up to Bell and Nelly, and said—

"I came to tell you that I am sorry, now really sorry, for having given you so much trouble, for"—

They would not suffer him to say more.

"Dinna speak of it, dinna speak of it," cried Nelly. "Laddies will be laddies to the world's end. You had nae thocht o' the ill ye were doin'."

"No," he said, eagerly, "indeed we did not mean to do so much mischief. We did not think. It was only the fun and racing that carried us on. But, Bell, I did think, I did know, what I said to you when I pretended to apologise, and indeed I am most of all sorry for that."

Bell was now fairly in tears.

"It was a' my faut," she said; "I'm sure I wish I had bitten my tongue out afore I had said a word aboot it. It was a' my faut. I'm just an auld cankered body that I suld gang an' tell the maister on ye. An' ye a' in fun an' daffin', an' thinkin' nae ill."

"No; it was our fault," he insisted, "and most mine. But you will forget it! I wish you could and would."

"I'll ne'er think o' it again," she answered, heartily, and, with a warm shake of the hand, he left the room.

His work was, however, only half done. He crossed the dining-room and bed-room quickly, resolutely; paused a moment at the study door, and then knocked.

"Come in," cried Mr Gordon, and he opened the door and entered boldly.

Mr Gordon had recognised Lionel's step, and had perhaps expected that he came to tell him that he did not choose to obey his orders, for he looked up with a grave, expectant, even stern face. It brightened as soon as he saw the expression upon Lionel's.

"Papa," Lionel said, "I am sorry to disturb you. I only came to tell you—You supposed that I left the room to obey you, and I knew that you supposed it, and yet I did not mean to obey you. I thought," with a great effort, "that I ought to tell you that I did not deserve your confidence. I would have deceived you if I had not been ashamed. I did deceive you, for my apology to Bell was only an insult. And all the time you stayed here trusting to me to do what I had made you expect I should do. And I did not deserve to be trusted."

"You did, you do," was Mr Gordon's ready answer; "you show you do by coming here now. Your apology could not satisfy your conscience."

"Ah, but perhaps it might," he replied, ingenuously; "I was trying hard to make it do so when I came across Cecil, and he persuaded me," in a low voice, "to ask God to drive away the evil thoughts, and to show me how to put matters right."

"And you did?" Mr Gordon asked, much interested.

"Yes, papa, and God made me feel that I must go and make it up with Bell, and come and tell you that I had meant to deceive you."

"You might have meant it, Lionel, but you could not," Mr Gordon said, confidently. "Since you were a baby I have had the most perfect trust in your truthfulness and honesty. And now that God has by His grace touched your heart with His fear and His love, I know that you will never deceive me."

"You don't know how near it was though," Lionel said, humbly, and at the same time greatly comforted by his father's hearty assurance of trust in him.

"I did know when you left the room that it would give you a hard fight to obey me," he said, smiling; "for indeed, Lionel, I have not perfect confidence in your submission. But I knew that if you did disobey me, you yourself would tell me that you had. I was as sure of it as if I had followed you every step after you left me."

Lionel looked greatly gratified, and resolved in his heart that, with God's good help, he should never give his father cause to withdraw his confidence. He left the study, feeling himself a different creature, softened, humble, and leaning only upon God for strength to do right.

Mrs Gordon did not return until considerably past the usual tea-time, and, while waiting for her, the young people occupied themselves in useful garden work as a kind of penance for their mischief.

She brought home with her a large basketful of hot-

house flowers, and they had to be admired and disposed of, the history of her visits gossipped over, and tea prepared before she could be told what had been doing in her absence. When the older ones were quietly seated round the table, and the babies had been carried off by Mary for a stroll round the garden, Mr Gordon began—

“Ah, well! it is quite as well that you have enjoyed your afternoon, for I don’t know when I shall be able to spare you again. These little scapegraces get into hot water the moment your back is turned; and I have all the trouble of pulling them out.”

“And is it not quite fair that you should have that trouble sometimes?” she asked, laughing. “Indeed, I think I shall make a point of going away two or three afternoons in every week, in order to make sure that you get your own share of the troubles of the family.”

“No, mamma, don’t,” cried Malcolm; “papa is a great deal too fierce. It is a thousand times better to have to do with you, when we get into a mess.”

“Was I so terribly fierce to-day?” Mr Gordon asked, amused.

Malcolm coloured.

“Well, you know,” he said, bluntly, “you looked as black as night, and thundered forth your orders in awful style.”

“Thundered!” repeated Agnes, indignantly. “Oh, Malcolm! When you know papa never speaks loud even when he is angry. Thundering, indeed! One would think that he got into a passion like Sir Charles Scott.”

“I did not say that he shouted,” Malcolm persisted.

“Sir Charles shouts. But I do say that papa’s few words, so distinct, short, and decided, do come out like thunder, whether he speaks loud or not. They are a hundred times more terrific than all Sir Charles’s spluttering, shouting rage.”

Both Mr and Mrs Gordon were a good deal amused by the discussion. Mr Gordon asked Malcolm if he did not think they deserved a few black looks and thundering words, and that they ought to be grateful that they had got nothing worse? Malcolm looked very dubious. Mrs Gordon asked for a history of the trouble. The children gave it between them. Mr Gordon had not heard from Bell of all the bantering and impertinence which had first broken in upon her patience, and he could not help a few smiles at the description of her in her smart cap and apron, and old patched wrapper. Mrs Gordon looked very grave over the account of the after mischief.

“Indeed,” she said, “I almost wonder that papa stopped short at black looks and thundering orders. It was unpardonable to give the servants so much trouble, to add to their work, which is only too hard already. And all the more unpardonable when you consider that it was from kindness and affection alone that they took upon them so much to which they were altogether unaccustomed.”

“Yes, indeed, mamma,” said Malcolm, eagerly, “I really was sorry that we had given them so much trouble; but then Bell was provoking, you know.”

“Not till we had provoked her,” said Lionel, decidedly.

"It was a shame from the very beginning. It was a great shame to laugh at her when she was put out, to begin with."

"Oh, it was only fun, you know. Only a little teasing."

"Only planting as many thorns as you could in poor Bell's way," Mrs Gordon said, seriously. "Only making her feel as uncomfortable as possible."

"Well, mamma, yes, of course, that is all right," Malcolm said, moving restlessly in his chair. "But after all, you know, mamma, people cannot go through the world without meeting with little thorns of that kind, and it is quite as well that they should get accustomed to them."

"So you have seriously resolved to take up the thankless task of sowing thorns in the way of all your friends, in order to accustom them to a pain and annoyance which may or may not at some future time come in their way," Mr Gordon said, drily. "I congratulate you, Malcolm. Your life may be useful, but I cannot promise you that it will be happy."

Malcolm reddened and looked vexed.

"I did not mean that I would seriously set myself to accustom people to thorns," he said; "but only I don't think that a little teasing and laughing at people is quite a fault, or at least it is not a bad one."

"Let me ask you, Malcolm," said Mr Gordon, "have you any more right to rob a man of his temper, of the sunshine of his spirit, of the pleasantness of the passing moment, than you have to rob him of his money or goods?"

“Well, no, papa, I suppose not,” he admitted, reluctantly.

“We must remember, too,” pursued Mrs Gordon, “that God’s command is very broad and quite unlimited. It is nowhere said that we are to be kind to one another in general, but may be teasing and provoking now and then; that we are to be kind in great things, but not in small.”

“To be sure not, mamma,” he said; adding frankly, “and to be sure it is a shame to interfere with Bell’s sunshine, for she has not too much of it, she does so bother herself about things.”

“Yes, indeed she does,” said Agnes; “you can’t think how vexed she was at there being no smart footman, nor even a smart maid, to open the door to Lady Colville. If Mary had been in the way, she would not have cared. She is always so glad when Mary opens the door. Poor Bell, with all her troubles and worries, has but little sunshine. It was a shame to take any away by our nonsense.”

“As we never know how or when we shall be able to bring sunshine back into any spirit,” said Mrs Gordon, “so it is always a shame to take the least bit away. A cross look, a hasty word, a careless action, may do that in a moment which we cannot undo in an hour, perhaps not in a day.”

“Only, to be sure, Malcolm is right,” observed Lionel. “It is foolish, it is wrong, to allow such little thorns, such little clouds, to give us much annoyance. We should take better care of our sunshine.”

“To be sure,” said Mr Gordon, “that is what we have often said. Our sunshine, our pleasant happy feelings are never given for our own use alone, but also for the use and good of every one near us; so that we are bound to see to keep our own sunshine bright, as well as to make sunshine for others.”

“And we should keep out of the way of thorns when we can,” Agnes added, laughing, “lest they should make holes in our tempers.”

“Certainly, we should pull up the thorns, pass them by, jump over them, or keep out of their way as much as possible, he assented;” “and if we do get a prick or scratch, we should see to get it healed at once, and never suffer it to rankle or fester until it becomes a serious wound.”

“Ah,” said Colin, looking at his mamma, “that was what you said I did the other day when poor Ned broke my top. I fretted and grumbled, and made myself so sure that to play with my top was the only thing I could do, that I got as cross as two sticks, and never grew better till bed-time.”

“And I know,” said Lionel, laughing, “that when the book one was reading goes astray, one can either let the scratch in the temper grow very deep and angry, by thinking continually over the pleasure one might have had in reading it; or one can heal the little prick in a moment, by finding some other delightful book to take its place.”

“And when a little cloud comes over the spirit,” said Mr Gordon, “we know not how or from whence, we may allow it to spread and blacken until the last morsel

of sunshine is gone, and the whole sky looks black and dreary."

"Oh, I know that happens sometimes," cried Agnes; "but what can one do? One feels sad, dull, and fretful, but one knows not how or why."

"Seize hold of the cloud at once," said Mr Gordon, "and demand roughly what it is doing here; and if it can give no good account of itself, send it about its business without a moment's delay, and give it orders to come no more back that way. Many and many a fair day is overclouded and made unhappy, uncomfortable, and useless, for a little grievance that could not for a moment have stood questioning, as to its reality or extent; but because we allow the uncomfortable, sore feeling to grow and spread without knowing how or why, it goes on and on until it gets beyond our power to check it."

"Such a little grievance as our teasing Bell to-day?" asked Malcolm, slyly.

"But you must remember, my boy," said his father, "that as we have no means of questioning and packing away the clouds on another's sunshine, no way of pulling the thorns out of their spirits, so, as I said before, we have no right to draw up the clouds, to sow the thorns. We may be philosophical about our own trifling grievances, and we ought to be; but as we cannot force our philosophy upon others, so we should see to give them as little as possible use for it."

At this moment Bell put her head in at the door with a beaming face.

"Master Lionel," she said, "do ye know that there are six young rabbits in the house?"

Know it! Of course they did not, or they could not have sat there discussing the philosophy of thorns or of anything else. In a moment the five were on their feet, and after having nearly dragged the table-cloth and tea-equipage away with them, they stumbled down-stairs after each other in double-quick time, Davie and Worry bringing up the rear, in a fever of curiosity and excitement.

"And there goes my lecture to the four winds," said Mr Gordon.

"Or to the six rabbits," his wife added, smiling. "Did they plague you much to-day?"

"No, only I did not very well know what to do with them. I did not wish to be too hard upon them, because I knew pretty well there must have been more of wildness than of malice in their mischief. At the same time, it seemed necessary to teach them that they have no right to give the servants trouble for their amusement."

"Certainly it was, it is," she answered; "and even as to the mere joking and teasing, it is right to check them. It cannot be right to allow them to hurt the feelings of any one for their diversion."

"I felt that. They have learned pretty well, in the case of Davie and Madge, that little things can call up sunshine in the heart. It is well that they should see that little things can also cloud it over."

"I often think," she said, after a moment's thought,

“that it has been in some ways good for the children that we have lost our fortune.”

“We *know* it,” he answered, quickly, “we *know* that *all* things are working together for good, for the best.”

“True,” she said, with ready sympathy and much feeling; “it is such a happiness to know it.”

“And in this case,” he added, “we can really see it. The boys were always manly, but they are getting much more independent, much more ready in resource, and prompt in action, now that they have all to do for themselves.”

“Yes, and more particularly in the three elder children. I see a great improvement in the habit of rendering those small attentions to others, those little acts of unselfishness and kindness, which have certainly a great deal to do with the happiness of home.”

“I have often observed it lately,” he answered. “I like to see Agnes look up from her book to see that you have a chair or a footstool, or to pick up the scissors or thimble which you have dropped; or Malcolm put away his carving or joining to help Blanche in her house-building; or, as I saw yesterday, Lionel, when most intent upon his painting, find out that the sun had come into your eyes, as you lay with that bad headache on the sofa, and rise softly to draw down the blind.”

“And in our walks,” pursued Mrs Gordon. “They don’t know how pleasant it is to have one and another turn back from the most exciting game or discussion to help me over a stile, to hold back a troublesome branch, or to point out a bad step in the path.”

"To be sure such small things bring far more sunshine than they can well believe ; and it is such a good thing to have given them a strong reason for such small duties. You took them at the right moment when their hearts were full of concern for your happiness, of dread lest it should suffer from our change of fortune, of anxiety to do anything they could to save you ; and you showed them how much lay in their power, and how entirely it was God's wish that they should do all they could to bring sunshine among us."

"And really they are good children," she said, with much feeling. "It seems to me that few families are so happy as we are. Things go on so pleasantly and smoothly. As we so often say, there is so much sunshine among us."

"In spite of the thunder-clouds Malcolm accuses me of calling up," he said, rising ; "but if we expect them to keep our sunshine bright, I suppose we ought to consider theirs as much as we can ; and no doubt our presence is desired to admire these wonderful rabbits."

They found all the eight children in the rabbit court. The three little ones had just been made happy, by being each presented in all due form with one of the newly-born children. Hitherto the proprietorship had descended no lower than the twins. Willie could hardly understand his own dignity as master of a real live rabbit. But Blanche and Ned were in a noisy rapture, and Blanche was stupefying poor Ned and amusing the other children by the string of extraordinary names which she proposed to confer upon her new treasure.

She was in great doubt between Morgan and Mamma, and was bitterly indignant with Colin for trying to convince her that they were both very stupid names, when Mrs Gordon came to her relief. Blanche had entered a little into the interest which all were taking in the Crimean battles, and was delighted to have Alma suggested as a good name. This was a capital hint, upon which all acted, and presently such names as Kertch, Kars, Inkermann, and Balaklava, were conferred upon the new-born bundles of down ; while poor Ned was utterly confounded by being told that his was to be called Batchiserai, which unpronounceable name he speedily converted into Batchy, to his own great relief.





CHAPTER XV.

A HOME WITHOUT SUNSHINE.

MN the end of August Mr Gordon had the great pleasure of a visit from his friend Mr Douglas. He came and stayed more than eight days with him. He slept at the inn, as there was no spare bed at Sunny Brae, but was all the day with his friends. It was a great happiness to the whole party. Mr Douglas insisted that Mr Gordon should give himself an entire holiday. And while the rest of perfect idleness was good for both body and mind, he enjoyed it as much as a schoolboy could have done. The children had holidays too, and as the weather was very beautiful, the whole family might be said to live these eight days out of doors.

Immediately after breakfast, always before ten o'clock, they were a-foot, setting off in a body for a chosen spot among the many beautiful ones around them, sometimes seven or eight miles away, sometimes quite near home. The children divided between them the labour of carrying the luncheon basket, a book, work, or sketching

materials for Mrs Gordon, neither they nor the gentlemen making any such provision for their own amusement or occupation, being content to be perfectly and luxuriously idle. They took the walk, whether long or short, in a pleasant, leisurely way. As they were all together, there was no cause for haste, nothing to take them home sooner than they chose. They went by quiet, retired ways, and sat down or lay down on the grass, whenever fatigue or a fine view rendered a pause desirable.

Then, when their journey's end was reached, now on the grassy bank by the quiet river or loch, now among the woods, now within sight and sound of the waterfalls, now on the open hill-side for the sake of the view or of the cool breeze, or now behind a tall rock for the sake of the shade, they opened the basket and made a hearty meal, which they called dinner or luncheon, as the hour of day or their fancy dictated. Afterwards the children dispersed in search of wild flowers, ferns, mosses, or simply of adventures. Sometimes the gentlemen went with them, and left Mrs Gordon to her book. At other times they lay on the grass beside her, and chatted of all things new and old, great and small, while she worked or sketched. And when they pleased, they returned home to a dinner-tea, or tea-dinner, whichever you like to call it.

Very intense and luxurious was the enjoyment of those days, when they gave themselves up to idleness, and to the full enjoyment of every good and pleasure that came in their way; to the sights of beauty which met their eyes on every side; to the sounds of melody and happy-

ness which filled their ears ; to the freshness of the mountain breezes which played upon them ; and best of all, to the free, full interchange of thought and feeling, with those who loved and thoroughly understood them. The whole party were suited to each other, suited to enjoy and to give enjoyment. In the full vigour of health and strength, the long walk was a pleasure, not a burden. Even Cecil was unusually strong ; and if he now and then got a little tired, his father and Mr Douglas were ready to carry him, king's-cushion fashion, until he was rested again. Genial and hearty in spirit, cheerful in temper, everything seemed pleasant, even little troubles and disasters were only amusing. Each joy was multiplied by the number who shared it ; and each one anxious to make all the others happy, there were none of those jars of temper, none of those discordant tastes and fancies, which so often disturb the enjoyment of regular picnic parties, and turn the day of pleasure, as Miss Edgeworth's Rosamond found it, into a day of pain.

Twice in the course of the eight days thus spent, the three nursery ones were added to the party, and their wild delight and noisy enjoyment made another feature in the pleasures of the day. A cart conveyed them, Mary, and the larger provision for dinner, to and from the scene of action, and the elder children had the option of forming one of the riotous cart-party or of walking with the elders, as they chose. On the other days the babies made themselves happy at home, with their constant resource, Mrs Morgan, to help them, and had generally an imitation picnic in the orchard or by the river

side, at which Mary, Mrs Morgan, and once or twice Bell and Nelly assisted.

On the second last evening of Mr Douglas's visit, the boys had, as usual, gone on before the others, to warn the servants to get tea ready; while Agnes, a little tired, remained with the elders. Having given their message, the boys proceeded to unpack a basket of roots which they had brought with them, and to plant them out in the borders. They had been very successful this day, and were so busy getting their treasures disposed of to the best advantage, that they did not observe that the others were longer than usual of coming home. Just as the last plant was taken out, and Lionel, looking round upon the landscape, had observed that it was getting late, Agnes came down the garden, looking disconcerted and thoroughly put out.

"Was there ever such a bore?" she began, sitting down upon the washing-green fence. "Could there be anything more provoking?"

"We can answer the question better when you tell us what the bore is," Lionel remarked, coolly, while carefully shaking in earth round the roots of a most rare and valuable orchis.

"Oh," she answered, discontentedly, "it is only that our pleasure for to-morrow is spoilt—all our delightful plans overturned."

"Overturned?" they all repeated; "why? are we not to go to the falls?"

"No indeed; we are to go instead to a tiresome, stiff, set-up dinner-party with people we know nothing about."

“But why? but how? where is the use?” cried one and another.

“Use! no use in the world; only the most abominable nonsense.”

“But tell us why it is, and how it is, and where it is,” Lionel said.

Agnes told that, as they were coming home, they were overtaken by a pony-carriage, driven by a gentleman with a lady at his side. This gentleman and lady, it seemed, had met Mr Douglas abroad, and had become very intimate with him. They recognised each other in passing, and he stood still some time talking to them, while the others walked slowly on. When he overtook his friends, the strangers were with him, anxious to be introduced. They had taken a place in the neighbourhood, and were very anxious to become acquainted with the Gordons. Rather pleasant people they seemed to be, Agnes confessed, but they had offended her beyond forgiveness by insisting that the whole party should spend the following day with them, and so give up the enchanting scheme they had laid for a day beside some beautiful waterfalls, in a wild, lonely spot up among the hills.

“And where are they living? and what is their name? and are there any young people?” asked Malcolm, as they prepared to obey Bell’s summons to go in to tea.

“Their name is Granville, I think. They are living at Dalcrogin; and of course there are children, for we are asked expressly that we may make acquaintance with them.”

"At Dalcroglin! Oh well, that is not so bad," Lionel said; "I have often wanted to see that place. You know, Malcolm, how much we wished to get among those trees and braes the other day when we were looking down upon it from the hill."

Malcolm assented. Dalcroglin was indeed a very tempting spot, filling up, as it did, a lovely glen in the very heart of the hills. There was a park with very fine trees, a mountain stream running through it, with all the cheerful noise, ripple, and repetition of falls characteristic of mountain burns. There were wild nooks on every side up the mountains, sunny nooks in the glen below, and picturesque ivied gateways and old walls, everything most tempting to the eye and to the fancy. The boys could not be sorry that they were to have a nearer view, a more active enjoyment of such a place, and comforted each other with the reflection that, whether the people were stiff and set-up or not, at least they boys could always get away by themselves, and find amusements to their own tastes.

Agnes, coming slowly up the garden after them, privately thought such consolations very selfish. If there were girls, of course she must stay with them while the boys were away enjoying themselves, and she did think they might have pitied her a little more than they seemed inclined to do. She did not care for stranger girls, they were almost sure to be stupid and tiresome; and how should she ever be able to bear them without the boys, and with the constant recollection of all the pleasure they had hoped to enjoy together? She was quite sure that

the whole thing would be an intolerable bore ; and so dismal were her forebodings, that she sat down to tea with a countenance so utterly woe-begone as to make her father and mother fear that she had done too much, and was too much fatigued.

“ For your sake, my dear,” said Mrs Gordon, “ I am rather glad that our plans should be changed. You have taken too many long walks lately without any rest between. You look thoroughly done out.”

The speech was very displeasing to Agnes, who liked to believe herself able to do all that the boys did. She was, however, very much tired, although she would not allow it, and was therefore less able to resist the fretfulness and discontent which were clouding over her spirit. She sat gloomy and silent all through tea, unable to reconcile herself to the morrow’s prospects, unable to enjoy the recollection of the day’s happiness, unable even to attend to the amusing history Mr Douglas gave the boys, of his first meeting with the Granvilles, in an attack of banditti, on the Italian mountains. She was at last aroused from her abstraction by hearing her mother ask Mr Douglas, how he liked the children of the family.

“ The children !” he said, with a peculiar smile. “ Oh, well,” adding, after a pause, “ they are not Gordons.”

He said no more, but his smile and manner were sufficient to make Agnes feel still more confident that no pleasure could come out of the morrow’s expedition.

After tea the gentlemen went out for a stroll. Mrs Gordon reminded Agnes that the frock which she must

wear on the morrow had met with an accident the last time it had been on, that part of a tuck had to be hemmed up, and a clean frill tacked on to the cape. Agnes was not at all in the humour for such work. She only wished to sit still to rest, and to fret. But it must be done ; and she could not grumble when she saw her mother, who was still more tired than herself, sit down contentedly to repair some damages in the boy's garments ; so she got out her working materials with the best grace she could, and sat down beside the open window.

Colin knelt upon a stool at her feet, and with his elbows upon the sill, his head out of the window, was constantly fidgeting about, kicking her with his restless feet, knocking down her scissors and reel of cotton with his equally restless elbows. Agnes contrived to keep impatience from her tongue, but she could not banish it from her heart ; and she was fast getting completely out of temper, when the older boys, busy laying out flowers and ferns for drying, unceremoniously demanded from her a fresh supply of blotting-paper.

"I don't know where it is," she said, crossly. "You boys have mislaid it somewhere."

"Of course it is always the boys who mislay things," Lionel retorted. "It can never be the girls."

Agnes did not answer him ; but when Colin, for the sixth time, threw down her scissors, she fretfully desired him either to go away from the window, or to keep still. She might have said more, had she not, in picking up the scissors, caught an anxious glance from her mother, which seemed to entreat her to keep her temper In-

stantly there flashed through Agnes's mind the remark she had herself made to Mrs Gordon that afternoon.

"Mamma," she had said, "I think the sun always shines among us now;" and Mrs Gordon had answered, "Out here on the hill-side it is pretty bright and cheery. We must see to carry home a good deal with us, and keep it prisoner."

"To be sure," thought Agnes, "it will never do to turn our past pleasure into a cause for present cloudiness and gloom;" and, after a momentary struggle with herself, she rose quietly, and set about looking for the lost blotting-paper.

It was rather a tedious search. The boys really had mislaid it, and Agnes had to turn over all the books and papers in their different repositories up-stairs and down before she found it. When one is very tired, and at the same time anxious to get through with disagreeable work, it is trying to be obliged to leave it, and to take a great deal of trouble to seek for an article which seems most obstinately to refuse to be found. But the effort necessary was good for Agnes's temper, and when she at last found it, the boys' gratitude was still more healing.

"Thank you," cried Lionel, looking up at her with a very bright pleasant smile. "You are ever and always a dear, good, little Nestie. It was a shame to send you tramping all over the house for us. Only, you see, this beautiful wee flower was not easily laid out, and I could not well leave it when I had once begun."

"But I was quite idle, and might have gone," said Malcolm, "only Nest always spoils us and makes us

lazy. That is the worst of sisters, they always do spoil their brothers, doing everything for them."

These were most pleasant words to Agnes, who was really anxious to be a useful sister to the boys. She went back to her work with a greatly happier spirit, and fancied that the fairies must have been busy with her tuck, so much shorter looked the piece to be mended than it had done before.

It was perhaps as well for the young people's spirit of contentment that the weather changed through the night. The wind went round to the east. And although it was fair, and the sky, when seen, was still clear blue, yet a soft, damp mist hung over the hills, and veiled the sun. When Agnes, from her bed-room window, looked up to the hollow, high among the hills, which was filled by the loch, the scene of yesterday's pleasure, she could not help acknowledging that, on a day like the present, the enjoyment in such a scene could not have been great.

There was a little bustle after breakfast to get ready in time. The gentlemen had arranged to meet Mr Granville on the hills, that they might take a long walk together. But the Granvilles had insisted on sending a carriage for Mrs Gordon and the children, and it arrived soon after breakfast.

The drive was a pretty one, only the mist still hung about, and hid many beauties. They passed round the end of their own Knock, and entered upon a picturesque shady road through the tall, ivied gateway which had so often excited their admiration seen from the heights

above, and into the park. As I have said, there were many spots in the park well fitted to attract the eye and the imagination, and the children had full employment in pointing such out to each other, and deciding what games they could play, what moss-houses erect, or what other projects carry out in this and that particular place. One tree, in particular, struck their fancy. It was a splendid lime of remarkable size and beauty ; its wide, spreading branches sweeping down and touching the ground, so as to form a gigantic green bower. The children exclaimed with wonder and delight, while the coachman good-humouredly slackened the horses' pace that they might see the better.

“Fancy Blanche and Ned here, mamma,” cried Agnes. “Blanche would go out of her small wits ; how she would scream and dance with rapture.”

“It would be the prince of bowers for strawberry parties,” said Lionel, looking back to see the last of it.

“Oh, but here is the house. Look, Lionel!” cried Agnes. “Well, I don’t like it. It is sombre and grave.”

“And built in a hole,” said Lionel, greatly disappointed.

It was indeed a very handsome house, but rather built in a hole, as Lionel said. And although the whole place looked strikingly picturesque and beautiful seen from the heights above, yet it was a little disappointing when on the spot itself. There were fine glimpses on all sides of the hills which surrounded it. But the trees,

beautiful as they were in themselves, crowded too closely round the house, and shut out much that might otherwise have been seen.

"It is never for a moment to be compared to our dear, sunny Eagle's Crag," said Agnes. "Grander, I dare say, but not to be named in the same day for pleasantness. It is a dark, cloudy house."

And a more cloudy house she thought it the more she saw of it and of its inmates.

They were shown into the drawing-room, where Mrs Granville and her four children were waiting for them. Mrs Granville was, as Agnes had said, very pleasing both in manners and appearance; very gentle, and yet frank and kind. The children took a fancy to her at first sight. But of course the young people were most important in their eyes, and they were far less pleasing.

The eldest, a girl, Ruth, was a little older than Malcolm, Ronald was between Malcolm and Agnes in age; Walter a little older, and Lilla a good deal younger than the twins.

Ruth was decidedly the least agreeable-looking of the whole; a serious misfortune for Agnes, as, of course, the two girls must be expected to keep together. Ruth was very plain, and Agnes had quite a passion for beauty of all kinds. But Ruth was worse than plain-looking; her expression was sullen and forbidding. She hardly spoke to the children, but eyed them with the keen, watchful look of one who was anxious to find some cause of dislike. If Agnes thought that it would be difficult to like

Ruth, Ruth looked as if she were resolved not to like Agnes. Agnes was glad to turn from her to the boys, always more interesting in her eyes than girls.

Ronald was a fine, handsome boy, with a frank, good-humoured countenance. When I said that the children were far less pleasing than their mother, I might perhaps have made an exception in his favour, had it not been for a certain bold, reckless stare with which he looked at every one, old and young, and which seemed to betoken that he had never learned to show respect to his superiors, nor regard to the feelings of any.

Walter was also a handsome boy, but looked peevish and discontented. Lilla, the youngest, was a great beauty, dazzlingly fair, with delicate features, and large, spiritual-looking blue eyes. She had, besides, a very pretty figure, and was delightfully graceful in every movement and posture. The misfortune was, that she was too well aware of her own charms, and had nearly as much affectation as grace.

Such were the four companions with whom our friends were to spend the whole long day. As is always the case with children, they looked shyly at each other, and seemed not to know what to say or do. To relieve them, Mrs Granville proposed to the children to take their guests to the play-room.

“Or, perhaps, they might like to see the garden,” she said.

“Oh, we boys are going out certainly,” said Ronald, in his free, careless manner. “The girls may stay at home, and play with their dolls if they like.”

Agnes cast a beseeching glance on Lionel. He understood it, and responded, promptly—

“I think the girls and boys should keep together,” he said. “There are so many of us, we might have some famous games in the park.”

“Oh, well, as you like,” said Ronald; “only you don’t know what a bore these girls are. Ruth will sulk and find fault with every one, and Lilla will have no end of passions.”

“My dear Ronald,” his mother said, colouring.

But Ronald did not heed her. Ruth and Lilla went up-stairs to get ready, and Ronald brought a beautiful stuffed bird to show to Agnes. A minute or two were passed more amicably in examining and admiring it, and then Ronald exclaimed—

“Well, but come away out to the garden. What is the use of wasting the day in a drawing-room?”

“We don’t go without your sisters,” Lionel said, much more imperiously than he intended.

Ronald looked at him as if he would have said, “So you think yourself master, do you?” But he was really an easy-tempered boy, and after the look he only turned away with a careless, good-humoured laugh.

Mrs Granville went out of the room for a minute. Ronald and Walter followed her. The Gordons were left alone.

“Oh, what disagreeable children!” groaned Agnes, looking to her mother for sympathy. “Mamma, how shall we ever get on with them through a whole day?”

“By not concerning yourself about how you are to

get on with them," she answered, cheerfully; "but taking care that they shall get on comfortably with you. Give up your own pleasure for to-day as a hopeless matter if you like, and see if you cannot make a little pleasure for them."

"Rather a thankless task," Lionel remarked, scornfully; "and besides, it is their part to provide pleasure."

"But how, if they won't or don't?" Mrs Gordon answered, laughing. "Is not it better that pleasure should be provided some way or other, for one party or other? And, of course, if they don't provide for you, the only thing you can do is to provide for them. Seriously, dear Lionel," she added, with greater earnestness, "remember this is just one of the cases in which God bids us not to please ourselves, but to please one another."

Mrs Granville and the boys came back together, and the girls followed in a minute afterwards. Ruth was very sensibly dressed, in a plain Holland cape, and a good serviceable brown hat; but Lilla had put on a black velvet polka, and a pretty, fanciful hat with feathers.

"My dear child," her mother remonstrated, "your garden hat and cape would have been much better for romping in."

"Oh, but I don't care, I am going to wear this," Lilla said, with a pretty air of wilfulness, "I like to look pretty;" and she glanced from under her long eyelashes at Agnes with an arch look, which, from such a pretty face, Agnes thought most bewitching. She overlooked

the affectation in consideration of the beauty, and thought that the frankness of the admission made full amends for its conceit. With a smile she held out her hand to Lilla, who sprang forward, seized it, and hanging on her with a graceful, caressing manner, said—

“Ah, I am sure I shall like you, you have such nice eyes. I don’t like ugly, dull eyes, of no particular colour, like Ruth’s.”

Agnes’s sisterly feelings were a good deal shocked by this speech, but Lilla looked so sweet and smiling while she spoke it, that she hoped it was only a joke, and her clinging, caressing ways were so pleasant and pretty, that she could not find it in her heart to judge her severely. Ruth laughed scornfully, and followed the others in silence.

They went first to the garden. Here Ronald played the part of host remarkably well, taking care that his guests should see everything likely to please or amuse them, and gathering for them the finest fruit and flowers. He was, for the time at least, far the most agreeable of the four. Walter grumbled and complained because he wished to go here and not to go there, because he could not reach the apple he wanted, or because Ronald had gathered the very peach he had set his heart upon. Lilla, with all her beauty, grace, and affectation of playfulness, betrayed so continually her greedy desire to get the best of everything for herself, that even Agnes was provoked and disgusted. In the meantime, Ruth held aloof from all, silent and sullen as it seemed. Only once, when Agnes gave Cecil a beautiful peach which

Ronald had most gallantly gathered for her, and which he had declared was the finest in the garden, Ruth's face was brightened with a smile. And a few minutes afterwards, when the two girls were standing alone together, she gathered a beautiful sprig of geranium, and gave it to Agnes with an awkward kindness, saying, bluntly—

“I think I shall like you after all. I fancied that you were a goose for liking Lilla so much merely for her good looks; but I like you for being so kind to your little brother, giving him your own peach.”

“Oh, indeed,” said Agnes, laughing, “I don't call that kindness, I liked to give it to him.”

“And that was why I liked you,” Ruth persisted. “Anybody might give a peach to another, but not with such a bright, pleased look as you had.”

“But Ruth,” said Agnes, with more plainness than ceremony, “you don't seem to me to be very kind to your brothers. Why do you care so much for my being kind to mine.”

“My brothers are very different from yours,” Ruth said, shortly, a fact which Agnes would have been the last to deny. After a minute, Ruth added, “They are never kind to me.”

“Oh, but,” cried Agnes, eagerly, “you might begin. One side must begin, and if they don't, you can. And, Ruth, you can't think how pleasant it is.”

They were interrupted by the boys, who called them to come out to the park to play. But Agnes was surprised to see that her plain speaking had attracted Ruth,

who looked so ill-tempered that you might have supposed she could not have borne the least approach to a rebuke. Agnes could not understand Ruth; and indeed Ruth did not understand herself. Her temper was naturally unamiable, and she had taken no pains to control or improve it; but her feelings were deep and steady, her sense of right and wrong very clear and just; and often when she seemed most sullen, most disagreeable, it was only because she saw what was wrong in the conduct of others, and had not temper to put it right in a pleasant way.

In the park, a discussion began about the game they should play at, and the discussion, with marvellous rapidity, changed into a squabble. Ronald would not play at one game; Ruth, because Agnes had said she did not like it, was equally determined that they should not play at another. Walter would hear of nothing but hide-and-seek; Lilla, of nothing but follow-my-leader. The Gordons at first took no share in the discussion, but after a little Lionel lost all patience, and cried—

“Why, what fools you are! See here, Ronald, surely any game in the world would be more amusing than this squabbling. Ruth is the eldest of you. Let us play at what she chooses.”

“Oh, well, I don’t care,” he said, carelessly; “but you need not expect that the others will give in. Nobody will ever persuade Walter or Lilla to yield.”

“Oh, yes, they’ll give in. They’ll listen to reason, I’m sure,” Lionel said.

He caught hold of Lilla, who was dancing to and fro,

shaking her pretty curls, and crying out with gay wilfulness that she should play at nothing but follow-my-leader.

“See, little Pussie,” he said to her, coaxingly, “don’t you think that the most tiresome game in the world must be a hundred times less tiresome than wasting the whole day in disputes? Give up your game like a sensible little woman.”

“No, I won’t, I won’t,” she cried, jumping up and down, and shaking her head. “Never, never, I won’t, I won’t.”

“Why, what a silly little thing you are,” said Lionel. “Our Blanche has more sense than you, though she is only five years old. I did not know that you were such a mere baby.”

Lilla reddened. She had persisted only because she had taken up the notion that her pouting, perverse ways were pretty and becoming, and because she wished to see the Gordons give up to her, as she fancied they must, on account of her beauty. She did not at all like to be thought a silly little thing, a mere baby, by that tall, handsome boy, whose favour she was really anxious to gain. Lionel did not perceive her vexation. He had loosed his hold of her, and had not looked at her again. He had turned to Ruth, and said—

“Ruth, you see we cannot reason with such a stupid little thing as this, nor expect common sense from her. The only thing to be done is to give her her own way, because she has not sense to do without it. Let us play at follow-my-leader.”

Ruth assented very quietly. Walter began to remon-

strate; but Lionel would not listen, and he carried his point. Dictatorially, yet not disagreeably, he marshalled them into a circle, and began to count out for the leader. The lot fell upon Ronald, and the game began at last.

The Gordons hoped that now they might have a little comfort and pleasure; but it was not so. The squabbling went on as fast as the playing. Lilla, in her affection and desire to attract notice, danced out and in, and wilfully broke every rule of the game. Walter grumbled without ceasing; insisted that Ronald should not lead them there or should lead them here; complained of every little difficulty; and cried out, and brought them all to a full stop, whenever he struck his foot against a stone, or his arm against a tree; while Ronald laughed at and teased them both, and Ruth found fault with all in turn. Soon follow-my-leader was found impracticable with such disagreeable followers, and hide-and-seek was tried; but the spirit which had spoiled the pleasure of the one game was carried into the other,—teasing, complaining, and scolding went on with ever-increasing vigour.

This was a style of playing which the Gordons could not understand. Whatever were their faults, they were thoroughly pleasant playfellows, unselfish, hearty, ready to enjoy themselves, anxious that others should do so too, and willing to take what disasters came in their way, and to make the best of them. They did not know what to make of the constant quarrelling and selfishness of their companions. Cecil, a little tired with the pleasure and excitement of the last eight days, had not

spirits to bear the constant annoyance and jarring. Colin's fiery temper was getting irritated; and the three older ones hardly knew whether to be most provoked or amused, with what seemed to them such absurd perversity and folly.

"I never saw such a set of babies as you are!" was Lionel's unceremonious exclamation when the game had been stopped for the dozenth time, while Walter hotly accused Ronald of having pushed against him; and Ronald, by his laughing, provoking answers, prolonged the strife. "Do you ever think of anything but of making each other uncomfortable? Surely, Walter, a little push must be fifty times less unpleasant than getting into all that passion. Do try if you can for once really play instead of quarrelling. Variety is charming, you know. Try it, just for the novelty of the thing."

Of course, such a speech was not very conciliatory, nor very likely to improve matters. But before any one had time to answer, the attention of the party was called to Lilla, who darted off towards the house, crying that she knew what she was going to do, something much better than playing at their nasty games. At first, no one tried to stop her; but suddenly when Ronald saw where she was going, he sprang after her, calling out—

"You are not going to meddle with my pony, I can tell you, madam."

She hastened her speed, but the tall boy soon made up to her, and caught her by the dress. She struggled and screamed in a fearful passion.

"Let me go, let me go this instant," she cried. "Let

me go, I say. I hate you, you nasty, abominable boy—let me go, or I 'll bite you."

"Oh, I daresay you would if you could," he replied, with provoking coolness ; "but you shan't ride my pony for all that," and he held her fast.

"I don't want your nasty pony. I don't want anything belonging to you. I hate you, I do. Let me go!" she cried again, nearly choked with passion, and struggling violently to get free, or to turn round so as to strike him.

The others came up. Ruth scolded both Ronald and Lilla. The Gordons, greatly shocked, tried to interfere.

"For shame, for shame, Ronald," cried Malcolm, indignantly ; "do you call yourself a man, and tease a girl who cannot help herself? Let her go, I say."

Ronald tried to laugh off a little shame which Malcolm's words and tones had awakened. But he loosed his hold of Lilla, who ran shrieking to the house. Ruth, as usual, began a bitter condemnation of Roland, but he interrupted her.

"Fiddle-de-dee. Fe fa fum," he said, swinging himself lightly round upon his heel. "Don't you preach, Miss Sullenness ; you are as bad as any of us, and we are none of us angels. But I say, boys, that little firebrand's idea was a good one. Let us go and see my pony. I can't think how I did not show him to you before."

They followed him to an enclosed part of the park, where the pony reigned in solitary dignity. A short lull took place while they admired and made of the little creature, who was really very handsome and gentle.

"He is so tame," said Ronald, "although we have had him only a week."

"Say rather, *because* you have had him only a week," Agnes said, indignantly, as she observed how Ronald teased the little animal. "You will soon teach him to be frightened for you. Pray, Ronald, did you ever try whether making people and animals happy might not be quite as pleasant work as teasing them?"

"Never," said Ruth, emphatically; "he thinks it manly to tease girls and children, and poor dumb beasts, who cannot return the compliment. He would not tease a boy of his own age."

Agnes felt that Ruth's mode of censure did a great deal more harm than good; and yet she saw that there was a good deal of truth and justice in all she said; and she had some sympathy with her in her hasty indignation, when she recollects how she had often irritated her own brothers without intending it, by remarks similarly true, but similarly ill-timed and immoderate. She wished much to bring a little pleasure and sunshine among the party, and resolved to try.

"I think," she said, pleasantly, to Ronald, "you would find it answer, if you were to try for only one day, to make every one as comfortable as you can."

"He try indeed!" again put in Ruth; "I should like to see him!"

"After you, fair sister," he answered, making her a ceremonious bow; "I could never be so ill-bred as to go before my elders. Show me the example, and I shall follow it."

"Oh, well," cried Agnes, laughing, "you are more humble than I am. I don't mean to allow any one to go before me in this matter. I give you fair warning. I have started upon the race, and mean to be the first to make some one very happy.

"Should you like a ride upon my pretty little Donald?" he asked, quickly, and with a really pleasant smile.

Her eyes sparkled with delight.

"Indeed I should, thank you, very much," she cried; adding, as she caught the amused expression of his face, "Oh, I see what you mean. And, to be sure, you have beat me in the race. And is not it pleasant?" laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking up into his face.

"Oh, well, there is some pleasure in giving pleasure to you. You are such a famous, hearty girl," he answered readily. "But as for these"— He checked himself as he saw her look disappointed, and added—"But I must run off for the side-saddle," and whistling gaily, he disappeared.

He soon came back, laden with saddle and bridle. He was not very expert at putting them on. But the Gordon boys had been all their lives accustomed to horses, and supplied his deficiencies. In a few minutes Agnes was fairly in her seat.

"He is very good and gentle," said Ronald; "but I'll lead him at first, if you like."

"Lead him! I should think not," was her laughing answer, and lightly shaking the reins she started him off into a brisk canter round the field.

Agnes looked remarkably well on horseback, and rode beautifully. She had been accustomed to ride since she was four years old, and had been carefully taught by her father. She had not a particle of fear, knew perfectly how to manage her horse, and her seat and carriage were at once easy, graceful, and secure. The Granvilles watched her with admiration.

"What a pretty girl she is!" Ronald said, confidentially, to Lionel. "I did not think her so pretty before."

She was not, indeed, exactly a pretty girl, though she promised to be a very handsome woman. Her countenance was animated and expressive enough—expressive both of intellect and feeling; but it had not that sparkle and constant play of feature which made Lilla's so attractive. Agnes was what Ronald called her, a hearty girl. She had more capacity of enjoying thoroughly and deeply, whatever was enjoyable, than most girls of her age. But she was not one of the exclaiming, demonstrative genus. Neither by word nor look did she ever express more than she felt, and so other children, before they came to understand her, were apt to think her too grave, too quiet. Too quiet or grave she certainly was not, as any one could tell who had ever seen her at play with her brothers. But with strangers her manner was very still and calm. Now, with the wind blowing her hair over her face, with her eyes dancing, and her whole face glowing with intense enjoyment of her favourite exercise, she looked brighter and prettier than the Granvilles supposed it was in her power to look.

Twice round the field she cantered, and then checking

the pony beside the others, she sprang lightly to the ground. Ruth and Ronald pressed her to go round again, but she refused.

"I want to see you all have the pleasure," she cried, gaily. "I have had my share."

Lionel turned to Ruth, and offered to help her to mount. Ronald objected that Ruth could ride at any time, but the Gordon boys persisted in refusing to get on Donald until she had had her turn. Once round she went, and then dismounted.

"Now you, Lionel," cried Ronald, "I suppose you can manage with that saddle?"

But Lionel had already mounted Cecil, and after Cecil, Colin. Then he and Malcolm took their turns, and delighted Ronald by making his pony leap the park paling, a feat which he did not know it could accomplish. Ronald succeeded his guests, and with a little instruction, made out one or two leaps to his own intense satisfaction. Having once begun this new amusement, it seemed questionable when he might choose to give it over, although Walter was clamorously demanding to have his turn.

"Your turn, indeed!" cried Ronald at last, when Lionel began to plead Walter's right. "Who made it your turn, I should like to know? Is he not my own pony?"

"Papa gave it to you," said Ruth, "because it happened to be your birthday. But he never meant that we were not to have any good of it. If he knew how selfish you are, he would soon take Donald from you."

"Selfish or not," he replied, carelessly, pressing Donald up to another leap, "I'm not going to give up my pony to a little, crying, frightened baby like him."

He took two or three more turns, while Walter alternately reproached, whined, and entreated; and the Gordons, having failed in persuading Ronald, tried to convince Walter that his tears and complaints were foolish and childish. When he thought he had sufficiently asserted his own proprietorship, Ronald rode up to Agnes, and asked her if she should like to have the pony again.

"Thank you," she said, readily. But when Ronald had got off, she turned pleasantly to Walter, and said, "Here now, Walter, you get up."

"I did not give it to him, but to you," Ronald remonstrated. "You enjoy the ride so much, I wanted to see you have the pleasure again."

"Thank you; but I prefer seeing Walter have it," she answered, very quietly, while she helped the somewhat clumsy Walter to mount.

"He is such a baby, such a poor, frightened spoon, he can't ride a bit," Ronald said.

At the same time he suddenly cracked the whip he held in his hand, and Donald started. Walter screamed, and grasped the mane with both hands in most undignified, most unhorseman-like fashion. Ronald laughed.

"See what a tremendous pleasure a ride is to him!" he cried, scoffingly.

"We can make it a pleasure," Lionel answered, and going up to the pony, he patted it, quieted it, showed

Walter how to sit, and how to hold the bridle, and led Donald round the field, at first at a gentle walk, afterwards quickening the pace until Walter's nerves could bear, and suffer him to enjoy, a trot and a canter.

Ronald laughed at Lionel for taking so much pains with a coward, and repeatedly called to him to put Walter off and take a gallop himself. But Lionel paid no attention to him.

"Our Lionel never takes anything himself, if he thinks another wants it," said Colin, proudly.

"Oh, of course, your Lionel is the most amiable of human beings," Ronald answered, laughing carelessly rather than scoffingly.

He felt in his heart that Lionel was right. He had a vague feeling that these Gordon boys, with all their attention to and consideration for others, were really as manly, if not more manly, than he was. He looked after them as Lionel ran on, leading Donald, and Malcolm kept up with them to encourage Walter, and he could not convince himself, as he tried to do, that it was missyish to take so much pains to give pleasure, and to teach courage to a frightened boy.

Before Walter was satisfied, or Lionel would allow Ronald to turn him off, a sudden shower of rain drove them into the house. The Granvilles were in despair, for they had formed magnificent plans of out-door amusements for the afternoon. But the Gordons, experienced mountaineers, assured them that the shower would not last, that it would only break up the dull, hanging mist, wash the face of the hills, as Malcolm said, and make

everything look bright and clear. It was now so near the hour for their early dinner, that there was really little excuse for grumbling at being obliged to go in.

Ruth took Agnes up to her own room to get ready for dinner. She stood leaning against the wall watching her, while Agnes laid aside her hat and cape, brushed her hair, and washed her face and hands. Agnes, as usual, moved about briskly, and looked fresh and bright. Ruth looked listless and dull.

"How happy you look!" Ruth said at last. "You are all happy. How I wish that my brothers were to me what yours are to you!"

Agnes smiled a little, but did not speak. She was perfectly conscious that a third party might have told Ruth that she was not to her brothers what Agnes was to hers, but she could not express that consciousness. Ruth said something like it herself when she saw that Agnes did not speak.

"I know," she said, a little sadly, "that I am not a good sister to them. But you see what kind of brothers they are."

"I think," Agnes said, "that although you cannot make them good brothers, you might anyway begin by being a good sister."

"Don't think that I don't mean and wish to be," Ruth said, very earnestly. "I know I am very cross. As cross as can be, I know I am. But indeed, Agnes, you must not think I like to be cross. I do wish to do better. But when I see them so selfish, I can't help saying it out, crossly or not. But it is because I should

like them to be better. I have been worse than ever to-day, because I was so much ashamed of our boys beside yours. I should so like them to be less selfish."

"Do you know," said Agnes, thoughtfully, "I am afraid that is not the way to make them less selfish. Papa says that the sunshine of kindness is always the best thing for driving away the clouds of selfishness."

"I know better now what you mean by the sunshine of kindness," Ruth observed. "I see that there is something sunshiny and pleasant among you that never comes among us."

"But why should not it come among you?" Agnes asked. "Why don't you try to bring it among you?"

"Oh, I might try and try till I was tired, and never make anything of it," Ruth answered. "I can do nothing alone; and none of the others would think of helping me."

"But you can do something, you can do a great deal alone," Agnes insisted. "Papa says that the least among us can do something to bring sunshine into our home, by being gentle, kind, loving, and attentive."

"To be sure," Ruth answered, sadly, "I might easily enough be kinder and gentler than I am. But if all the others bring up clouds every minute, it does not seem as if any sunshine I could bring would be worth much."

"It would always be something, and something would be better than nothing," wisely answered Agnes. "And you know, Ruth, if fifty clouds had made up their minds to come up and cover the sky, and only one small one among them came to think that it was quite a pity to

shut out the sunshine ; although it could not keep back the other big dark clouds, it could always keep back itself. And when its turn came for darkening the sunshine, it could refuse to do it, and so let at least one little bit of the day be bright and pleasant."

"I don't know how clouds think, or make up their minds," Ruth said, laughing a little, but at the same time evidently pleased and interested by the image.

"Oh, you know what I mean," Agnes answered. "And look there, Ruth. There is a little speck of bright blue sky breaking the clouds. Watch it, and you'll see how it spreads and spreads until it makes the whole sky bright, and makes way for the sun to shine through."

The girls stood at the window, arm-in-arm, to watch. The rain had ceased, and, as the boys had predicted, had carried the mist away with it. The clouds were melting ; a small brightness had opened up among them straight opposite the window. While the girls looked, as Agnes had said, it spread and spread, deepening and brightening, until the place of the sun was reached, and way was made for him to shine out bright, warm, and cheering.

"See there now !" cried Agnes, triumphantly ; "did not I tell you ? Oh, to be sure, the best way of getting rid of clouds is to shine them away ; and however fast they come up, and however black they look, shine and shine on, and they will melt in the end."

"I might try, you know. To be sure, I might try," Ruth said, rather despondingly. "But I know quite

well, that when once Ronald begins his continual teasing, I cannot stand it. I cannot be sunshine a moment longer. I can only be a black cloud, blacker than any of them."

"But papa says it is our own fault if we ever allow little disagreeable or teasing things to grow up into regular clouds. When they begin, he says we should seize hold of them, give them a good shaking to drive the blackness out of them, and send them about their business."

"And how should you set about shaking the cloud of Ronald's teasing?" Ruth asked, laughing. "I did not know that we could catch hold of clouds or shake them."

"No, indeed," Agnes answered, returning her laugh; "but you know what I mean. And as to Ronald's teasing you, you can say, 'Ah, well, he has teased me, but there it is over, or shall be over, because I can run away from it; and when once it is over, there is little use thinking about or glooming over it.' Really, you know, Ruth, it is quite bad enough to have teasing or such disagreeable things come to us. It is a thousand pities to make the matter worse by glooming over them, and allowing them to plague us a minute longer than they need have done."

The luncheon-bell rang at this moment, and the little girls ran down-stairs. The returned sunshine had put all the young people into good spirits and good temper, and, during the first part of dinner it seemed as if there was going to be inward as well as outward brightness

and pleasantness. But, by and by, a discussion arose upon the plans for the afternoon, and all peace vanished on the instant. Each one of the four had a different plan to propose, and no one seemed ever to think of the possibility of giving up to the others. Ruth, with her talk with Agnes fresh in her mind, might indeed have yielded her own wishes ; but she believed that her plan would be most to the taste of their visitors : it was for that reason she had formed it. And, therefore, she considered herself not only justified, but right to persist. Mrs Granville looked much grieved and ashamed by her children's squabbling, and openly expressed disregard of each other's feelings and wishes ; and in her own gentle way she tried to check them, and to bring about a peaceable settlement of the question. But they were quite as little accustomed to attend to her, as to agree among themselves, and faster and hotter grew the discussion and the angry words.

Lionel and Malcolm had got over their first intense disgust at such quarrelling among brothers and sisters, and were rather inclined to be amused at the perversity which turned every amusement and pleasure into a cause of dispeace and discomfort. Malcolm had even begun to encourage the dispute by sly remarks and expressions of opinion, when an earnest whisper from his mother checked him, and caused Lionel to interfere in his decided, unceremonious manner.

“ Is not this all absurdity ? ” he said ; “ we may argue here until midnight. If none of you can make up your

minds to give in, how is the matter ever to be settled? The only plan is to draw lots as to who is to choose. We five promise to go with the chooser; and if you others don't please to go, why, you can stay at home, or go your own way."

"Agreed, agreed," cried Ronald and Ruth in a breath. Walter looked sulky, and declared the lots always went against him, and Lilla said that she ought to have the choice, because she had had none of the pleasure of riding on Donald. But neither Lionel nor any of the others paid much attention to their complaints, and the lots were drawn without further delay. This time it fell to Ruth to choose, and Ronald, with much readiness, gave in to her. Her choice was, indeed, more like his own than Walter's or Lilla's had been, so that his yielding was the more easy. Ronald had wished to climb to the top of one of the hills; Ruth, to follow one of the retired valleys up to its farther end. But the hill Ronald wished to climb was so near the valley Ruth chose, that it seemed that both plans might be joined into one. Part of Lilla's plan, too, was adopted. She had wished to find a quiet spot near home where they might make a fire and play at houses. There was nothing to hinder them, Lionel said, from making a fine gipsy encampment and fire at the place Ruth fancied, quite as well as nearer home. So it was settled, and they loaded themselves with eggs and potatoes to roast among the ashes.

As they were starting, Mrs Granville came out to the lobby to beg that they would take cloaks or plaids with

them to spread upon the ground where they meant to sit, as she feared that after the mist and rain there must be a good deal of dampness.

“Oh, fiddle-de-dee!” cried Ronald, impatiently; “the heather throws off the rain. There is not the least chance of damp upon the steep bank where we mean to be.”

Lionel looked at him with a kind of contemptuous surprise; and without speaking a word, he and Malcolm went back to the lobby, and each took down a water-proof cloak and hung it over their arms.

“Where is the use of bothering yourselves with these?” remonstrated Ronald; “there is not the smallest chance of dampness where we are going. What is the use of bothering with cloaks? I did not know that you were such molly-coddles as to care about getting damp feet.”

“I did not know that you were so little of a man as to say fiddle-de-dee to any woman’s request, much less to your mamma’s,” Lionel answered, very coolly. “If the bother were fifty times’ more than it is, it would surely be worth while to take it to please her.”

Ronald looked vexed, ashamed, perhaps a little angry; but he had already learned that he was no match for Lionel, who had a plain, unceremonious way of stating unpleasant truths which Ronald did not care to provoke. So they set off without further question.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE ACCIDENT.

THAT Ruth had made a good choice, all were forced to acknowledge, if not directly in words, at least by their open manifestation of enjoyment. An enjoyable walk it was, in truth, by the side of a mountain burn, which dashed and splashed with haste and bustle through a small glen leading back and up among the hills. The mists were quite gone, and whether the hills had had their faces washed or not, they were looking as bright and engaging as hills could look. There was a great deal of quiet beauty to be enjoyed, scrambles to be scrambled, a burn to be leaped over or paddled about in, braes to climb and to roll down, and wild pretty nooks and small waterfalls to be spied out, or to be unexpectedly come upon.

Heartily and fully did the boys enjoy all this store of pleasure spread out for them. They played at leap-frog, made leaping matches, climbing matches, and matches at rolling and tumbling down the braes, with untiring zeal, noise, and enjoyment.

Not so the girls. To Agnes's intense mortification, Ruth seemed to think it best that they should walk quietly like little ladies along the regular track, crossing the burn only when necessary, and then only in the most dignified manner, and choosing in every instance the wisest and easiest way of getting on. Ruth was at all times a much tamer, more sedate young lady than Agnes, and was in the present case even less than usual inclined to race and run with the boys. She had taken a great fancy to her little guest, desired to begin at once a firm friendship with her; desired also, poor child, very sincerely to get some good advice about her conduct to her brothers. For these ends nothing seemed to her more pleasant and suitable than to get quiet and entire possession of Agnes, to walk soberly, talk sensibly, and hear Agnes describe the happy, comfortable ways of her very happy home.

Now, Agnes liked well enough to talk sensibly, to describe the pleasantness of her own dear family, or to give good advice, at proper times and seasons. Up in Ruth's bed-room, while watching the rain and waiting for luncheon, good sense and philosophy had been all very well; but out here in the bright sunshine, on the wild hill-side, and with those charming races going on before her eyes, it was a very different matter. She could give only half attention and half patience to Ruth's discourse and questions, while enviously watching the boys, and intensely longing for only one little scamper over the braes, one little opportunity of showing that, girl as she was, she could get over the burn more

cleverly than Walter, if not than even Ronald. She could not have resisted the longing, could not have given Ruth even half attention, had she not so well remembered her mother's often repeated words, that her God in heaven required her to seek the pleasure of others more than her own at all times, and towards every one with whom He brought her to associate. It may seem a small sacrifice of inclination to make herself walk quietly by Ruth's side, instead of darting off to her favourite boys ; but it cost Agnes a good deal, and she made it only because she felt that God required it of her, and knew that she was trying even in this trifle to do His will.

When they reached the end of their walk, matters fell out more to Agnes's taste. Boys and girls mingled together, and every one was required to help in gathering fuel and building up the fire. Indeed, there were not too many of them, for the materials were by no means plentiful. The Granvilles had once or twice enjoyed the amusement of imitating a gipsy encampment and fire ; but it had been in the court-yard, where they had plenty of faggots or coal to burn easily, dry pavement for them to burn on, and good-natured servants to undertake the more difficult parts of the work. On the hill-side, with a scanty store of damp branches, and among the long, wet heather, they must have got on but badly, had the Gordons not been there. Seeing their ignorance and unskilfulness, Lionel and Malcolm very unceremoniously assumed the office of directors, and made their hosts work under them.

First as to fuel. Lionel grumbled a good deal over the false representations which Ronald and Ruth had given. They had spoken in grand and vague terms of a wood where they should find plenty of dead branches; but the wood had dwindled down into two or three old gnarled trees, twisted and bent by the wind, which were grouped round the spring from whence the little burn took its rise.

"Oh," Ronald said, "we can easily break off a few branches from the trees, as many as we need. Here goes," and he caught at one long swaying branch which hung near the ground.

"As if green wood like that would burn," Agnes said, laughing at his ignorance.

Lionel and Malcolm did not even condescend to laugh at, or to listen to the suggestions of such an ignoramus. Having set the younger ones to collect the few sticks which were lying about, they consulted together without reference to Ronald, as to how they could get at some dry, withered branches, which they could see among the green and growing ones. They were quick of invention, and skilful in execution. The pockets of all four Gordon boys were well furnished with pieces of string. Lionel carefully knotted several lengths together until he had a long enough line. To one end of this he tied a small stone, to make a weight which could be flung as they chose. Then he and Malcolm, by turns, with sure aim and well practised skill, shot it up and through among the branches, so as to catch the line over the one they had doomed to be brought down. When

once the string was securely fastened, two, three, or more of the boys, pulling at the two ends, brought down, crashing and crackling, the object of their wishes. Of course, by such a rough mode they broke a good many of the fresh branches which came in their way; but that they thought of little consequence. Lionel said the trees were of no value as timber, and the spot was so secluded, so hidden from view, that injury to the poor old trees could give little annoyance to any one. When the branches were fairly on the ground, the next thing was to cut them up into proper lengths for burning. The Gordons had strong clasp knives which did good service among the lesser twigs; and for the main body of the branches, the twins balanced them over a low stone with a sharp edge, and now sitting down, now jumping on them, one on each end, they broke them through by the mere force of their own weight. A great deal of merriment and laughter did this new mode of sawing or hacking wood excite. Of course, at every success Colin and Cecil had a tumble; but as it was on the soft heather, and from no great height, it only amused both them and their companions.

While the boys thus collected fuel, the two older girls, by Lionel's orders, found flat stones to form a hearth on which their fire might have a chance of burning. And then to Lionel, Malcolm, and Agnes was entrusted the delicate task of building it up. The wood was far too damp to burn freely at first. But, in passing through the court-yard as they set out, Lionel had very wisely taken possession of a large bundle of shavings

and a few dry chips, and with the help of these and a very liberal use of the lucifer matches which they had also brought, a grand roaring fire was at last kindled.

Good-humour and merriment had reigned while all were so busy. Lionel's pleasant, though dictatorial rule, had kept away all perverseness and teasing, and it really seemed as if a cheerful, pleasant afternoon was before them. To keep up the romance of a gipsy encampment, they all took upon themselves and assigned to each other different parts in the business of life. The girls were to watch the roasting of the potatoes and eggs. Malcolm headed a party made up of the three young boys, to search for a cottage among the hills where they might beg or steal as gipsies should; the object of their begging or stealing being simply a jug, wherein to carry water from the spring, but which, for the sake of appearances, they called a fine young pig, or a good fat hen for their dinner. Lilla was dressed up into the prettiest of gipsy, fortune-telling girls, although, as Agnes observed, her blue eyes and fair, golden curls, destroyed the romance of the thing. She had a bright-coloured turban, concocted by Agnes out of the boys' handkerchiefs. She had discarded her velvet polka after dinner, in order to show how pretty she could look in the plainest of dresses, and her loose white cape suited much better than the smart polka, the scarlet handkerchief now girding her waist. While she wandered about with pretty airs and graces, holding imaginary conversations with imaginary fine ladies and gay gentlemen who had come to visit the gipsy camp, the girls busied themselves about







The children endeavour to get up a Gipsy encampment. P. 358.



the fire, Lionel toiled to get down more wood, and Ronald hunted about among the braes and down the glen, for anything which he could find, to add to their comfort and diversion.

So had some time passed most happily and peaceably, when Ronald and Lilla came back together with a dead rabbit which Ronald had found. They were eager that Agnes should contrive to roast it for dinner. But, besides that she had not the least idea how to skin or prepare it for roasting, Lionel said that it was absurd and abominable to think of eating a creature which had died no one knew how or when. Ronald could not gainsay his arguments, but he was disappointed, and as usual vented his disappointment in teasing any or every one who came in his way. Lilla was his victim in this case. She wished to have the rabbit to examine for herself. But each time she held out her hand for it, Ronald drew the cold nose across her bare arm or neck, making her spring back with screams of real or affected dislike. She began to get angry.

“Oh, don’t tease her,” remonstrated Agnes. “It is not manly to tease a little girl.”

Ronald might have yielded to please Agnes, and because he felt that she was right, had not Ruth interfered in her hard way.

“You will never make Ronald give over teasing,” she said. “You might as well try to make the wind give over blowing.”

“Give me the rabbit,” cried Lilla, stamping her foot, and half crying.

Again he held it out, and as she made a sudden dart forward to catch it, he swung it forward against her face. Lilla sprang back. They had, without perceiving it, been getting nearer and nearer the fire. And now she stepped almost into it, and the flames, leaping high before the breeze, caught her dress.

Ruth and Agnes screamed. Lilla looked round, caught sight of the flames, felt the heat, and, with fearful shrieks, she darted wildly away, by her rapid motion increasing the draught and her own danger. Ronald, shocked and bewildered, with the first instinct of self-preservation, sprang back from her. But Lionel, who was coming up the bank with a load of wood, threw down his burden, and caught her in his arms, trying to crush out the flames with his own body. His strong cloth jacket and trousers did good service. But the flames had caught her loose, light cape, and the end of the cotton handkerchief she had bound round her waist. They mounted above where his arms grasped her. With his naked hands, fearless of danger, heedless of pain, he tried to catch and extinguish them. But higher and higher they rose. Lilla struggled fearfully. He could hardly keep hold of her. Already had the fire caught his own hair. He was getting blinded and suffocated by the flames, the pain was becoming unbearable, when Agnes rushed to his side, and threw one of the water-proof cloaks over Lilla. Lionel drew it tight round her, while Agnes, with his cap and her hands, beat out the flames raging round his own head. It was all the work of a minute. Agnes had caught up the cloak as quickly

as the terrified Ruth clinging to her would permit. Although light, its close texture and uninflammable materials made it the best possible extinguisher. Lilla's screams and struggles had suddenly ceased. She lay a dead weight in Lionel's arms, and did not resist the tight pressing of the cloak round her. Satisfied that all was safe, he laid her gently on the grass, and opened up the folds. She lay perfectly still, pale, and, as it seemed, lifeless. She had fainted, either through terror or pain.

"She is dead, and you, Ronald, have killed her!" shrieked Ruth.

Lionel looked up in sudden anger and pain, but the stern "Hush! for shame!" died upon his lips, as he saw Ruth throw herself on her face upon the grass in the wildest grief and fear.

Poor Ronald neither moved nor spoke. As pale and nearly as lifeless-looking as Lilla, he stood, leaning against a tree, looking down upon them with a wild, meaningless stare. Whether he had heard Ruth's words or not, they were only the echo of what his own heart was telling him, and nothing else seemed to exist for him, except the one fearful fact that Lilla was dead, and that through him.

Lionel and Agnes bent over the poor, senseless child.

"Is she dead?" Agnes asked, in a hoarse whisper.

Lionel's only answer was a dreary, despairing look round him, as if in quest for help or counsel. What to do with her? How to get her home? And he alone in that wild hill-side with children all younger and more helpless than himself.

At this instant Malcolm appeared coming over the face of the brae above them. Lilla's screams had reached the boys as they were coming back, and Malcolm had hastened on before the others in alarm. He was of much use. His nerves had not been shaken, like Lionel's, by the fearful sight of Lilla in flames. He was more able to think. He recollects once seeing a servant at Eagle's Crag in a faint, and recollects too what had been done to recover her. He ran and brought water from the spring in his cap. He dashed it in her face. She started, opened her eyes, but closed them again with a faint moan. He watched her anxiously. She moved a little, as if the hard ground hurt her, and gave again that feeble, wailing moan. The children, inexperienced as they were, had the sense to feel alarmed at the feebleness of the sound, as compared to her former violent screams.

"We must get her home," cried Lionel, rising with sudden decision. "We may hurt her," shuddering at the thought of touching her poor, scorched limbs; "but anything is better than suffering her to lie here."

Malcolm looked round. In dragging down the dead branches, they had broken off a large living one with all its sprays and foliage. Could they not lay some of the larger pieces lying round them across and along this branch, so as to make a kind of rude litter, such as they had read of only a day or two before in a book of travels? Lionel caught at the idea. There were plenty of branches, small and large, all round; and by bending and twisting them together, and tying them here and

there with string, they formed a litter strong enough at least to bear her light weight. The other boys had joined them by this time. Walter, poor fellow, was of little use; but the twins, of their own accord, occupied themselves in tearing up grass and moss and collecting leaves to lay upon the branches, to make them a little softer for poor Lilla to lie upon. The older boys gave up their jackets, the younger ones their tunics, and the girls their capes and handkerchiefs, for the same purpose. Hard and uncomfortable a bed it must be at the best, but at least they did all they could to make it better.

When all was ready, Lionel, Malcolm, and Agnes lifted Lilla on it with the utmost tenderness. She groaned, and even tried to resist them, but still did not seem conscious of where she was, or what had happened. It was this unconsciousness that alarmed the children so much. They did not understand how much the shock to her nerves might be the cause of it, and imputed it all to the effect of the dreadful pain of her burns. Lionel was the best able to understand what that pain was. His hands and neck were scorched and blistered, although his generous, brave desire to help Lilla kept him from thinking of, or even from much feeling the pain.

And now the sad procession was ready to set out, and to leave the fire they had taken so much pains to kindle, flaming and crackling away with as much cheerfulness and brightness as if nothing had happened. Lionel and Malcolm were the bearers, the twins walking beside them to watch that the frail litter did not give

way in any part. The young Granvilles were capable of nothing. Even when Agnes suggested that some one should hasten to the house to prepare Mrs Granville to receive them, and asked if there was no nearer road than the one by which they had come, no one seemed able to answer her. After a little questioning, she found out that there was such a road straight over the hill, and that Ronald knew it. But when it was proposed that he should go home that way, he shrank back shuddering, and declared that he could not tell his mother, that in point of fact he could never go home at all, could never look his father or mother again in the face, and meant to set off over the hills, and never to be seen again. It was idle to reason with him. It was in vain that Lionel and Malcolm sternly told him that this was mere selfish cowardice, that he had no right to give his parents further pain upon his account, because he had been in some measure the cause of Lilla's accident. His mind was so bewildered that he could listen to nothing, and it was only by Ruth and Agnes holding him fast between them, that he could be kept from going off at once.

In this new and additional difficulty, it was a great relief when Colin, who had gone to the top of the brae to see if he could trace out the nearer road for himself, descried the three gentlemen returning home over the hills, and only a little way below them. Having shouted the comforting news back to the others, he dashed down to meet them, heedless of road or no road, and in a few minutes Mr Granville and Mr Douglas were with the distressed and frightened children, while Mr Gordon went

straight to the house to break the news of the accident to Mrs Granville, and to send to Knock Earn for the doctor.

Lilla was by this time more conscious. The boys had carried her a little way, and the fresh breeze as they went against it had revived her. She knew her father, and stretched out her arms to him to take her up. He felt her pulse ; it was feeble and fluttering. The only thing was to get her home as speedily as possible. He and Mr Douglas proposed to carry her on the bed the boys had made for her, but she was so beset with strange, wild fears, wandering and confused as her mind still was, and she begged so piteously that her father would take her in his arms, that he thought best to comply. Tenderly he raised her, and carried her lying like an infant. Agnes, with the readiness and care of a woman, helped him, tied a handkerchief over the rim of Lilla's hat to shade her eyes from the sun, and carefully wrapped up her feet in one of the cloaks.

Mr Granville was a considerate man. Anxious and hurried as he was, he took time to look round upon the children, to comfort his own, and to praise the Gordons for what they had done. As he did so, he was struck with the expression of utter, despairing woe on Ronald's face.

" My dear boy," he said, kindly, " you must not give way too much. Be a man. Think of Ruth, and take care of her."

" O papa, it is not as you think," Ronald cried, in a trembling voice ; " but it was all my doing, all my fault. I did it to her."

He could say no more.

Mr Granville looked inquiringly, and Lionel in two or three words told how the accident had happened.

"But indeed, sir," he pleaded, earnestly, "he had not the least thought of hurting her, in the very least."

"Of course not," said Mr Granville, instantly. "No one can for a moment suppose that he had. Ronald, my dear boy, don't exaggerate the evil. You do very wrong to tease your sisters, as you so often do; but in this case, your fault is not at all greater than it has been in fifty, in a hundred cases, where you never blamed yourself at all."

He had turned away while speaking, and begun to descend the hill. Ronald sprang after him.

"And O papa," he cried, catching his arm, "can you, can mamma bear to look at me, to speak to me, when it was through me it all came?"

"My dear, dear boy, you don't know what you are saying," was all Mr Granville answered, as he bent over Lilla, to sooth a terror which had seized her, he knew not why.

Ronald was greatly comforted. It was a relief to have unburdened his mind, to have told his father the worst, and a relief whose greatness he could scarcely measure, to know that he was not looked upon with abhorrence for his share in the calamity. Agnes and Lionel took possession of him during the walk home, and soothed and comforted him with a kindness which was all the more refreshing, because Ronald felt that

they, so invariably kind to each other, might well have despised and detested him who was so different.

Very long and tedious seemed that walk, which had been so delightful two or three hours before; and a great relief it was to all to see the house again. Mrs Granville was ready to receive them calmly and collectedly. Although she was very gentle and a little languid in manner, she had a good deal of strength of character. Perhaps in this case it was unselfishness which gave her strength. She was too anxious about her child, too deeply grieved for her suffering, to have time to think about her own feelings. She had not time for hysterics or faintings, while caring for poor Lilla's comfort and relief.

Lilla was carried at once to her bed. Mrs Gordon and the housekeeper undressed her, and examined her injuries. They were not so severe as might have been expected; but it was impossible to calculate what might be the effect of so severe a shock on such a young child's frame. Very anxiously did all watch for the doctor.

He came, but not for a considerable time. Knock Earn was more than two miles off, and he had been from home when the messenger arrived. His report was very doubtful. The case was serious, he said—the danger of fever considerable. But at the same time there were good grounds for hope, and it might have been much worse. Perfect quiet was strictly enjoined, and the other children were not to be admitted into her room.

The doctor did not say it to Mr and Mrs Granville, but down-stairs to Mrs Gordon, he confessed that the danger was greatly increased by the fretful, uncontrolled temper of the child.

“Unselfishness and consideration for others are the greatest possible comfort to a doctor, whether they belong to the patient or the nurse,” he said.

“Here, then, is an unselfish enough, brave enough patient for you,” said Mr Douglas, bringing forward Lionel, and showing the painful burns which the boy had all this time concealed from his parents, in order not to add to the anxiety and trouble in the house.

His unselfishness and courage were fully rewarded, not by the doctor’s praises, although he was not sparing of them, but by his father’s and mother’s one glance of affectionate sympathy. They now for the first time came to understand how he had saved Lilla, and without praising or admiring him, they made him feel how thankful they were for what he had been able to do, and how fully they entered into his own joy and thankfulness.

As they could be of no more use, Mr and Mrs Gordon determined to go home, to make less bustle in the house. Mr Granville wished to send the carriage with them, but to this they would not listen. The walk was by no means long, and would be only a pleasure, and to the children’s great delight the walk was resolved upon. After a day of so much excitement and vexation, a quiet walk home in the pleasant autumn evening would be indeed refresh-

ing. Lionel, I ought to have said, was carried off by the doctor in his gig. Although so uncomplaining, he was suffering too much to be able for any exertion.

When Agnes returned to the drawing-room, after getting ready, she found that a proposal had been made that she should remain to keep Ruth company, while Mrs Granville was occupied with Lilla. Agnes cast a beseeching glance at her mother; she could not bear the thought of being left behind. Mrs Gordon could only repeat what she had said before, that she should like Agnes to decide. Agnes's decision could not be declared, so eagerly and earnestly did Ruth and Ronald entreat her to stay.

"Mamma," she whispered, even with tears, "oh, must I stay? I want to nurse Lionel. O mamma, I should so like to go with you." She thought of the quarrels that had tried and annoyed her all day, and the peace and sunshine of her own dear home seemed irresistibly inviting.

"I think Lionel can do without you better than Ruth," Mrs Gordon said, gently; "but I should like you to decide for yourself. Only, Agnes, love," she added, in a lower tone, meant only for her child's ear, "remember, 'even Christ pleased not Himself;' you know what He wishes His children to do."

"Yes, mamma, if only it were not so hard." She bent down her head for a minute, then raised it again, and said, very quietly, "I shall stay, mamma."

Ruth and Ronald overwhelmed her with thanks. In

the darkening twilight her tears were not seen. No one but her mother knew how much it had cost her to consent. But having once resolved to make the sacrifice, she tried hard to make it cheerfully. And after she had once borne the pain of seeing the happy home-party set out without her, she found cheerfulness not so very difficult.

The evening passed much more pleasantly than she had at all expected. Ruth and Ronald had been softened by the sorrow and anxiety through which they had passed. All inclination to quarrel and dispute was, for the time at least, taken from them. They were kind to each other, and attentive and agreeable to her. There were many curiosities about the house to amuse and interest Agnes. There was a large collection of stuffed birds, very attractive to her, as she had considerable knowledge of natural history, and there were several portfolios of fine engravings of the most celebrated places which the Granvilles had visited in their late tour on the Continent. These were a peculiar treat to Agnes, who had heard of all these places from Mr Douglas, and she was much entertained by hearing the children describe what he had before described to her, and in completing their recollections with what she had heard from him.

When they had told all they had to tell, they wished Agnes to be the talker in her turn. They were curious to hear about Eagle's Crag, about their leaving it, and about their life at Sunny Brae—and Agnes was very willing to gratify them. She liked dearly to describe

her happy home, and to dwell upon all the pleasure and love that were so fully poured into her life. She had no thought of preaching to, or teaching her listeners ; but at the right time for Ruth and Ronald, came her description of the love and kindness which reigned at Sunny Brae. Love and sympathy for their own little sister had been awakened in an unusual manner in their hearts. They both secretly mourned over their former unkindness to her, and were therefore the more ready to receive a lesson from the example of children whose conduct towards each other was so opposite to their own.

Still less did Agnes think of praising herself in anything that she said. When she spoke enthusiastically of her father and mother's constant cheerfulness under every trial and privation, and of their hearty, glad enjoyment of every good, she had little consciousness of the share she and her brothers had in that cheerfulness and contentment. But so it must always be. The pleasant-tempered, pleasant-mannered, kind, attentive, considerate child must make glad the heart of his father and mother. And in that gladness there is not only the deep happiness of knowing that their child is dutiful and loving, but also freedom from that constant anxiety, from those hourly annoyances, worries, and trials of temper which the fretful or heedless child so often brings into his home. Many little boys and girls who do most heartily love their father and mother, who would, like Lionel, desire to take any amount of labour or toil to earn money for their comfort or pleasure, do yet make life very comfort-

less and trying to them, by heedless inattention to their wishes, by frequent small disobediences, by frettings and grumblings over orders or restrictions, and by useless complainings about unavoidable little disasters and disappointments. It was by watching against such lesser faults, by attending to those more trifling duties, that our Gordon friends made their home life so cheerful, so sunny and pleasant. But to return to Agnes and her companions. The two girls slept that night in the same bed; and in the darkness of the night, when they were alone together, Ruth, with many tears, unburdened her heart to her new friend. She told her how bitterly she felt her past unkindness to poor little Lilla, and in a kind of agony she cried—

“And if she never gets better! O Agnes, if I can never tell her that I love her; when I have always been so hard, so unkind.”

Agnes could not by experience enter into the full depths of poor Ruth's feelings, for Agnes had never been suffered to behave to her brothers or sister as Ruth had to Lilla. But even the strength and warmth of her love for all her dear ones made her feel how terrible it must be, when conscience could accuse as Ruth's was now doing. And fancying herself in Ruth's position, recalling those little quarrels she had now and then had with one or another of the boys, and imagining that he whom she had offended had been brought into circumstances of such danger as poor Lilla, before she had time to reconcile herself to him, she could feel for

Ruth from the very bottom of her heart. It was hard to know how to comfort her; for Agnes had too much good principle and good feeling to allow of her making light of a sister's unkindness towards a younger sister. She could only point out to the sobbing, agitated girl, the one comfort and refuge in the hour of trial, and advise her to pour out her whole heart to God, confessing her sin before Him, and asking Him in His love to give her an opportunity of showing Lilla that she really loved her. Ruth had been taught the truths of religion; but she knew little of their real living power to direct the conduct or to comfort the heart. She caught eagerly at the hope Agnes suggested, and at her earnest entreaty Agnes knelt beside her in the bed, and in simple words prayed to God to send her the help and comfort she so sorely needed. Ruth was comforted and soothed by the prayer. And the severe lesson of this day was never forgotten by her. She was not perhaps very quick to see her duty; but when once her eyes were opened to it, she was earnest and steady in trying to perform it.

This meeting with the Gordons was indeed in the end a great blessing to all the Granvilles. Mr and Mrs Gordon invited Ruth and Ronald to Sunny Brae, in order to keep the house quieter for Lilla. Ruth, with her newly-awakened sense of duty and affection for Lilla, hesitated about going from home at such a time; but as she could not be admitted into the sick-room for some days at least, her mother persuaded her that it was best she should go. And as Lilla slowly recovered, and was

in the course of a few days declared to be out of danger, very heartily did Ruth and Ronald enjoy their visit. To be sure, at Sunny Brae there were not the luxuries and means of enjoyment to which they had been accustomed at Dalcroglin; but there were kindness and love, and all the pleasant sunshine and cheeriness which kindness and love bring with them. And although the Gordons did now and then disagree and squabble like other children, these quarrels were considered by themselves and by their parents as such serious and disgraceful faults, that even the failures were made, by the mode of treating them, useful lessons to the little visitors; while the principle of being kind to one another, because God desired them to be so, was so constantly recognised by all, so constantly kept before their minds, that Ruth and Ronald, during their three weeks' visit, could not help having it impressed upon their own hearts.

And now, my dear little readers, I don't intend to tell you anything more about Sunny Brae or its inmates. I might go on for a good deal longer with histories of how they succeeded here, and how they failed there, in carrying their own principles into practice. But I am afraid of wearying you. I should like much better to have my little friends teasing me with questions about Agnes and her brothers, and about how they got on, and what they did, than to have any one of you saying, as you closed the book—"Oh, well, I am not sorry that it is done. We have had quite enough of it." And if any of my little friends should by this story have been inspired with

a wish to please their God and Father in heaven, by doing all they can to make His children upon earth happy and comfortable, to bring sunshine and pleasantness into their own homes, into the hearts of father, mother, brothers, sisters, servants, and friends, I shall think well spent the many hours it has cost me to write it.



